

Jobs axe poised over NHS managers

NICHOLAS TIMMINS
Public Policy Editor

Up to 5,000 administrative and management jobs are to go in the NHS over the next 12 months as the Government takes the axe to some of the bureaucracy that the NHS market has created.

The £130m to be saved will mean "more white coats and fewer grey suits", Stephen Dorrell, the Secretary of State for Health said yesterday, as he

published league tables showing four to five-fold variations in how much NHS trusts spend on management. Insisting that the money would be spent on patient care, Mr Dorrell said the savings, which are required by his Budget settlement for the NHS, were "challenging but achievable".

Mergers of health and family health services authorities will reduce management spending by more than £26m next year on top of this year's £14m sav-

ing, Mr Dorrell said. In addition, NHS trusts are being required to reduce their management costs by 5 per cent, saving just over £100m in real terms.

On top of a string of savings from slimming down the Department of Health and the NHS Executive, and abolishing regional health authorities, the move will produce a total of £300m in reduced bureaucracy by 1997 compared to the amount spent last year, Mr Dorrell said. "We are winning

the war against bureaucracy. I regard it as jobs transferring out of administrative work into patient care."

The league tables show wide variations in management spending between trusts - from 2.1 per cent of its budget by the Chelsea and Westminster hospitals and the Freeman group in Newcastle upon Tyne to a reported 10.8 per cent by the Royal London Homoeopathic and 7.9 per cent spent by the Royal National Hospital for

Rheumatic Diseases. The average spent by trusts was 3.9 per cent, but significant numbers spent 6 per cent or more.

Health authorities also show three-fold variations in management spending last year from more than £10 per head of population in Huntingdon, the Prime Minister's constituency, to £3.20 in Bristol. The league tables come with detailed health warnings that like has to be compared with like. Some variation in man-

agement spending is acceptable. Health authorities' costs can vary as a result of dealing with more trusts, managing widespread change, and having a population with a high rate of turnover. Trusts also vary by type - larger trusts tend to make economies of scale - and smaller ones tend to have proportionately higher costs.

Harriet Harman, Labour's health spokeswoman, condemned the attack on red tape as a sham. "It is the Tories them-

selves who created the bureaucracy that they are now pretending to attack," she said - adding that it was fitting that John Major's health authority, was at the bottom of the league.

Noel Flannery, deputy director of the Institute of Health Services Management, said his organisation agreed that management costs should be reduced. But the figures provided only "a very basic snapshot" and said nothing about the quality of management.

Woman in abortion case wanted child

A childless woman who was given an abortion during a routine operation - although she had not known she was pregnant - desperately wanted to start a family, she told a jury yesterday.

Doctors were also unaware that Barbara Whiten, now 38, was pregnant when she was admitted to the King's Mill Hospital, Sutton in Ashfield, Nottinghamshire, in 1993 for a hysterectomy operation.

A consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist, Reginald Dixon, 58, of Kirby in Ashfield, Nottinghamshire, who performed the operation, denies unlawfully procuring a miscarriage.

When asked if she had any children, Mrs Whiten, told Nottingham Crown Court: "I would have loved to have had a baby." She said the hospital had told her she was infertile and the operation was necessary to cure her of endometriosis, a painful condition of the womb.

"It isn't a very nice thing for a woman to come to terms with - the fact that she is infertile and to find the only course of action is to have a hysterectomy. The last thing that I thought was that I was pregnant."

The court heard that when Mr Dixon started the operation he discovered Mrs Whiten was pregnant. He tried to contact her husband by phone but could not reach him. He then con-

tinued with the operation, inevitably aborting the 11-week-old fetus.

Simeon Maskey QC, for the prosecution, said: "Mr Dixon knew she was pregnant and decided to terminate the pregnancy, not because he had considered the Abortion Act or because he considered otherwise there would be grave permanent damage to her mental health, but because he thought that was what she would have wanted and he thought it was in her best interests."

"So he had other reasons in mind but not the reasons that made the termination lawful."

Mrs Whiten told the jury that Mr Dixon spoke to her about the abortion the day after surgery. She alleged he told her he "suspected the womb was rather swollen, I suspected there was a pregnancy, I carried on because it was what you would have wanted."

Mrs Whiten said: "I couldn't believe what I was hearing. If he had come around the curtain and hit me with a sledgehammer it would have had less effect."

But Nicola Davies QC, for Mr Dixon, said that when Mrs Whiten was told about the abortion: "You gave Mr Dixon a small smile and told him 'Don't worry, you did the right thing.'"

The case continues.

First rail franchise for bus company

FROM PAGE 1

will not prevent the bid from going through. The company will have three months to take over services, which means Britain's first privatised trains are likely to run on 1 April next year. The two other early franchises, Great Western Railway and London, Tilbury and Southend services are set to go to management buy out teams.

Last year, Stagecoach - which owns bus firms in New Zealand, Hong Kong and Malawi - made a profit £32.6m on turnover of £338m. Shares reached a peak of 284p yesterday.

The company has faced over 20 investigations by the Office of Fair Trading and four inquiries by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. In August the MMC found that the company's tactics in combating

the local competition in Darlington were "predatory, deplorable and against the public interest."

But the Commission decided not to prevent the company operating in the area because "it would be a disservice to the people of Darlington" since other firms had been driven out of business.

The company has always defended itself against such criticism, saying local monopolies are necessary for the successful operation of its services. As testimony to its commitment to good service, the company points to its recent order for 1,100 new buses.

Stagecoach's early success means it is likely to become Britain's biggest private rail operator since it is planning to bid for all 25 rail franchises. Self-off row, page 9



Roger Turner: smears have cost United Gas millions of pounds

Photograph: Peter Macdiarmid

United Gas prepared to sue over 'smear'

United Gas, one of the new independent challengers to British Gas's traditional monopoly, is prepared to issue writs for millions of pounds against the people they believe are smearing its reputation, its managing director said yesterday.

Sitting in his sparsely decorated offices close to St James's Park underground station, London, the soberly dressed figure of Roger Turner, United's head, could not look more different from Richard Branson, the

colourful Virgin entrepreneur, if he tried. Yet, Mr Turner and Mr Branson, as the United chief was quick to point out, may have a common bond. A few years ago, Mr Branson's Virgin Atlantic airline was targeted in an infamous "dirty tricks" campaign by British Airways, its much larger rival. Now, Mr Turner firmly believes United is itself being threatened.

The disclosure in the Inde-

pendent this week that a senior external public relations consultant to British Gas had handed out an anonymous document critical of Clare Spottiswoode, boss of Ofgas, the industry regulator, had forced Mr Turner to re-examine the anonymous criticisms that have been made against United.

"We suffered real damage," said Mr Turner. "Because of what was being said about us, we could not develop some

business relationships." The smear campaign, he said, "has cost us millions of pounds - I would love to know where it came from."

One of the documents circulated about United detailed how the company had used a residential address in Fulham, west London, to make multiple applications for licences to secure gas.

Ten companies owned by United directors had made the

applications. It all seemed sinister and somehow underhand. What the document, and the subsequent press coverage, did not highlight, was that the address was the home of United's companies formations solicitor, Malcolm Fontayne.

He was merely complying with official filing requirements to give a home address. What the coverage also failed to mention was that the authorities knew all along what United was doing, and had given their approval.

British Gas to review lobby strategy

CHRIS BLACKHURST
Westminster Correspondent

British Gas is reviewing its government relations strategy and parliamentary lobbying effort, said by industry experts to be the most extensive in the country.

Among the lobbying and public relations firms retained by British Gas are Ian Greer Associates, Lowe Bell, Public Policy Unit, Luther Pendragon and the Maitland Consultancy. Together they have been responsible for putting the beleaguered company's message across to MPs, peers, Whitehall officials and the press. That is in addition to the company's internal, 33-strong corporate affairs department, headed by director, Peter Sagunetti.

This week, the Independent revealed one of the external consultants retained by British Gas, Angus Maitland of the Maitland Consultancy, had given out an anonymous document attacking Claire Spottiswoode, director-general of Ofgas.

The disclosure has led to calls from Labour for an Office of Fair Trading inquiry and threats of legal action from United Gas, a rival of British Gas, which believes it has been the victim of similar tactics.

Mr Sagunetti has also shaken-up his in-house staff, moving Neil Hayes, the company's head of media relations for three years, to oversee its international PR operation. Mr Hayes' job is currently on offer at a salary, thought to be about £80,000.

Details of the review were confirmed to PR Week, the industry journal. A company spokesman said it was "looking at proposals on a range of different issues", affecting its external advisors.

Whitbread plans hotels for County Hall

JOHN SHEPHERD

Tourists coming to London will soon be able to stay at County Hall, the former home of the defunct Greater London Council, for as little as £10 a night.

The brewing company Whitbread has signed a deal with Shiryama Shokusan, the Japanese owners of the building on the South Bank, to develop a 200-room, four star Marriott hotel and a 318-room Travel Inn budget hotel.

Alan Parker, managing di-

rector of Whitbread's hotel division, said prices at the budget hotel would be pitched at just over £40 a night for a room sleeping up to four people.

Staying at the Marriott, however, will be more expensive. Rates at the Marriott in Grosvenor Square start at £140 a night for four.

Leisure analysts at City stock brokers said Whitbread had secured one of the best hotel sites that has become available in London for years. "In terms of location, being oppo-

site the House of Parliament, it couldn't be better," one said.

There was some scepticism, however, that the deal would be concluded. Ken Livingstone, MP and former GLC leader, said: "We've had three years of Shiryama announcing this and that and nothing's happened. It's been a series of gimmicks."

Whitbread is confident the hotels will be up and running in 1998, even though Mac Oskoto, European director of Shiryama, injected caution into yesterday's announcement.

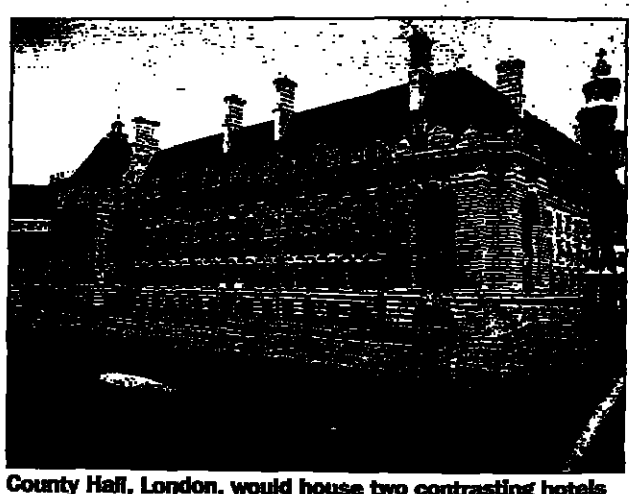
Asked whether the Whitbread deal would founder, as did previous hotel plans with Richard Branson's Virgin group, he said: "Nothing is certain in this world. It is like marriage. Who can stop someone who wants divorce? We have exchanged a contract agreement, and anyone can terminate it."

Whitbread will occupy 360,000 sq ft of space in the north wing, and an aquarium being built in the basement by Shiryama will absorb a further 200,000 of the building's total

1.2 million sq ft of space. There are also plans for shops and more leisure facilities.

County Hall has been empty since Baroness Thatcher abolished the GLC a decade ago. "The fact that it's remained empty is the scandal," Mr Livingstone said.

Shiryama, a property development company, bought the 1920s building in 1992 for £60m. Financial details of the deal with Whitbread, which is taking a 75-year lease, are not being disclosed.



County Hall, London, would house two contrasting hotels

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Dawn raid pulls in 2,300 burglary suspects

LOUISE JURY
and RICHARD SMITH

The biggest combined police operation ever carried out in Britain saw at least £1.5m of stolen property recovered in dawn raids on the homes of 3,700 suspected burglars yesterday.

Twelve thousand officers - one-tenth of the police in England and Wales - made more than 2,300 arrests in the giant

swoop, codenamed Operation Christmas Cracker.

Among the finds were a £10,000 speedboat in landlocked Kidderminster, which also emerged as the home of an illegal factory manufacturing the drug known as "skunk weed". Firearms with 20 rounds of ammunition were seized in Nottinghamshire and Hereford police were last night caring for two fully grown exotic iguanas.

Co-ordinated by the West

Mercia police, the offensive was timed to beat Christmas sprees by burglars who take advantage of rich pickings in households stocking up with presents, food and drink.

As the arrests mounted, David Blakey, West Mercia's Chief Constable, issued a warning to thieves: "You are now a prime target for police. If you continue to commit crime, you are running a greater risk than ever before that you will be

caught and brought to justice."

The blitz followed several weeks of talks between 40 forces and capitalised on the previous success of initiatives such as Operation Bumblebee which have made tackling burglary a priority in response to public demand. South Yorkshire, Greater Manchester, Cheshire and Staffordshire chose to continue with existing anti-burglary operations.

Mr Blakey said the aim was

to "strike a resounding blow against these criminals who bring misery and to transfer fear from potential victims to the burglars themselves".

Many of those arrested, including not only suspected burglars, will be hailed by police stations and be back on the streets within hours, but strict conditions will be placed on their behaviour.

A substantial haul of heroin

was found in Dorset and counterfeit banknotes in South Wales. In Cambridgeshire, one man was arrested as a result of a DNA profile and a missing 16-year-old was found at a house in Devon and Cornwall and returned to parents. Almost 140 pirate videos and computer games worth £88,000 were found in Brentwood, Essex.

Merseyside Police, which made 84 arrests, found a lock-up garage in Crosby contained £57,000 of goods, including

the components to build a conservatory.

Two constables were injured chasing a suspect who escaped in Hertfordshire and a man with a knife broke an arm and leg jumping from a third-floor window in west London. He was detained in Hillingdon Hospital.

In the capital, where 343 people were arrested at 794 addresses, Assistant Commissioner Ian Johnston stressed the value of co-operation. An ear-

lier operation had found property stolen in Kent in Cornwall, for example.

The Prime Minister congratulated the police. "There is no doubt that over the last couple of years innovative policing methods have made a distinct impact on the level of crime."

Last year nearly 680,000 domestic burglaries were reported in England and Wales with a 22.6 per cent detection rate.

Letter from a killer: Moors murderer writes to Independent denying she has ever been 'hand-in-hand' with Rosemary West



'We have not formed a friendship'

On 7 May 1966, the day after my own trial and conviction 29½ years ago, my name was on the front page of the Daily Mail and every other newspaper in the country.

On 23 November 1995, my name was on the front page of the Daily Mail in massive headlines: "Hand in Hand with Hindley". "reporting" my "macabre" friendship with Rosemary West. This was the day after her trial and conviction at Gloucester.

If this article is providing some light relief and entertainment at my expense from the heaviness of the Gloucester trial, it isn't only, yet again, disseminating yet another strand of fabricated garbage to weave into myth, it is also causing acute distress to my mother and family, who had to cope with the headline horrors of following my own trial and who have had little respite from them since.

I read this nonsense more than a week ago and decided to ignore it and treat it with the contempt it deserves. But since then it has been picked up and reported by other tabloids and repeated in the Daily Mail. I now have no option but to issue this statement to say I will be making a formal complaint to the PCC

about the Mail in particular and the Evening Standard which copied almost word for word the Mail's piece.

I will be refuting claims that Rosemary West and myself have formed a "macabre" friendship, that we have ever held hands, prayed together in the chapel or anywhere else, crooked snacks for each other, watched television together in each other's cells and that I sent her a "Good Luck" card before the start of the trial or at any other time.

Nor was I "fascinated" by her when she arrived on H-wing. She was on H-wing before I arrived and was just one of 44 inmates.

Whoever these "prison sources" are who made these "revelations" to the Mail and other papers, it is obvious to me that they received money for this "information" and it is yet another example of cheque book journalism.

If not, it is just another opportunity to drag my name into the headlines to boost circulation, and says more about the journalists and their sources than about reality and the truth which, of course doesn't sell newspapers and which is something that tabloid editors and journalists wouldn't recognise anyway.

Hindley says reports of relationship is 'nonsense'

STEVE BOGGAN
Chief Reporter

Myra Hindley is to complain to the Press Complaints Commission about newspaper claims that she has developed a "macabre" relationship with Rosemary West in prison.

In a statement released to the Independent yesterday, the Moors murderer denied reports that she had held hands with West, that they had prayed together, watched television or crooked meals for one another in Durham jail.

Reports of a relationship have been circulating since last month when West, 41, was jailed for life for the murders of 10 women and girls, including her daughter, Heather, 16, and stepdaughter, Chantaine, eight. Both women are serving life sentences on the jail's top-security women's H-wing, but they are currently in the prison hospital, where Hindley is recovering from a broken leg and West is under 24-hour watch be-

cause of fears that she may try to follow her husband Frederick and commit suicide. The two women being held yards apart but, according to Hindley, they have not become friends.

A front page report in the Daily Mail headlined: "Hand in hand with Hindley" appeared the day after West was sentenced. It said: "The two most evil women in Britain - both openly bisexual - have been seen holding hands in Durham Prison. They were drawn together by shared religion; and the 51-year-old Moors Murderess became West's confidante and adviser. They have made unsupervised visits to each other's cell, and prayed together in the jail chapel."

"Hindley even sent a 'Good Luck' card before the start of the 31-day trial at Winchester Crown Court which has appalled the nation."

In a hand-written statement, Hindley said she initially decided to ignore the claims but now had "no option" other

than to refute them because they had been picked up and repeated by other newspapers.

She wrote: "On 27 May 1966, the day after my own trial and conviction twenty nine and a half years ago, my name was on the front page of the Daily Mail and every other newspaper in the country. On 23 November 1995, my name was on the front page of the Daily Mail in massive headlines 'Hand in hand with Hindley', reporting my 'macabre' friendship with Rosemary West."

Describing the report as "nonsense", she said she intends to write to the Press Complaints Commission. "I will be refuting claims that Rosemary West and myself have formed a 'macabre' friendship, that we have ever held hands, prayed together in the chapel or anywhere else, crooked snacks for each other, watched television together in each other's cells and that I sent her a 'Good Luck' card before the start of the trial or at any other time."

Nor was I 'fascinated' by her when she arrived on H-wing. She was on H-wing before I arrived and was just one of 44 inmates."

Her complaint, she said, would be against the Daily Mail and the London Evening Standard, which repeated the story. "Whoever these 'prison sources' are who made these 'revelations' to the Mail and other papers, it is obvious to me that they received money for this 'information', and it is yet another example of cheque-book journalism," she wrote.

The Home Office refused to discuss the speculation yesterday, arguing that it never comments on individual prisoners. But a source with access to the wing said: "When there are only 44 people in a confined space, it is inevitable that almost everyone will spend some time with everyone else at some point."

"I'm sure Hindley has spoken to West but there is no special relationship."

Another source said: "The reports are completely untrue."

Rosemary's children stay loyal

WILL BENNETT

Two of Rosemary West's children believe she is innocent of murder even though they suffered the violence which she inflicted on youngsters at 25 Cromwell Street, Gloucester.

Stephen West, 22, and his sister Mae, 23, describe in a television documentary to be shown tonight how they were shocked when the jury at Winchester Crown Court convicted their mother of 10 charges of murder. They also talk about the beatings and sexual abuse which characterised their upbringing.

Both say that the case could have come to light years earlier if those in authority had asked the right questions. Stephen also says that his father, Fred West, who was charged with 12 murders and who committed suicide in prison, told him that at one stage he came close to giving himself up to police.

In the BBC1 documentary, Inside 25 Cromwell Street,



Stephen and Mae West, who tell of life in 25 Cromwell Street in a BBC documentary tonight. Photograph: PA

Stephen describes how his mother called him home from school, made him strip naked and tied his hands to the base of a toilet where she beat him with the buckle end of a belt for 20 minutes before accusing him of stealing sex magazines.

Mae describes how her father sexually abused his older daughters. "He said that all fathers broke their daughters in," she said. "He used to say the first born of a daughter should be the father's."

Stephen says that when he

visited his father when he was on remand on sex charges in 1992 "he started saying he had been covering up stuff from all of us. He said his life began when we went to sleep at night."

"I asked him what he meant but he wouldn't elaborate. He said it had been going on for years and went back to when he was in Scotland. He said it was a worse crime than anyone could imagine and the police would find out soon and he would never leave prison."

After Fred was arrested for murder Stephen spoke to him in prison. "He told me he would never tell anybody the whole truth, only what they needed to know. He said it was worse than I could imagine and he had no intention of telling everything."

Both children say that they did not realise how abnormal life in the West household was. Mae explains: "We had nothing to compare it against because we were never really allowed to go to other friends' houses."

RACING GREEN isn't about being FASHIONABLE
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4
news

MP in gay libel trial told doctor he was impotent

REBECCA FOWLER

A doctor who treated the Tory MP David Ashby for depression said he was impotent, and denied he confided concern that he felt homosexual inclinations.

Dr Lewis Sevvit, a Harley Street physician, was giving evidence in Mr Ashby's libel case against the *Sunday Times* and Andrew Neil, the former editor. Mr Ashby denies he is a homosexual.

When Mr Ashby, 55, first visited Mr Sevvit's surgery in 1993, he complained of anxiety. "He was suffering from a great deal of stress," Dr Sevvit said.

"As part of that, it was clear his interest in sex had been much diminished. He told me he had been unable to have sexual relations with his wife for four years."

Dr Sevvit said he prescribed anti-depressants in the hope it would improve Mr Ashby's condition. "I would have hoped his medication would have been successful... and his interest and ability to make love would have improved. As it was I don't think there was much change."

But Dr Sevvit denied Mr Ashby was concerned he was having a mid-life crisis, and experiencing homosexual feelings, exacerbated by his wife's allegations that he was a homosexual. "It was clear he had

financial, social and work pressures," Dr Sevvit said.

Mr Ashby denies that he had homosexual relations with Dr Ciaran Kilduff, 32, a medical doctor, who lived in the flat beneath Mr Ashby's in Putney, south-west London, after he separated from his wife in 1993.

When Dr Kilduff, also giving evidence yesterday, was asked if he had girlfriends he said yes, but he refused to comment on how intimate his relations with them had been or are now. "I don't presume to discuss my love life on public view," he said.

The two men, who both deny they have been physically intimate, became friends when Mr Ashby met Dr Kilduff in the garden when Mr Ashby was looking for a flat to buy.

Richard Hartley QC, for the *Sunday Times*, asked Dr Kilduff how they struck up such a quick friendship, and ended up sitting next to each other on a flight to the United States a month later. "Didn't you think it was a bit forward?" Mr Hartley asked.

"Brash, but you know what politicians are like," Dr Kilduff said. "As a doctor, my business is to establish a rapport with people within a 10-minute consultation. I would tend to be quite open."

Mr Ashby and Dr Kilduff admit they shared a double bed on a trip to France last year,

but deny they had a homosexual relationship. Dr Kilduff also dismissed suggestions that they shared a bed on a number of occasions in Putney. "That's not true, it simply didn't happen," Dr Kilduff said.

The two men travelled to northern France in January 1994 on a carefully budgeted trip. Dr Kilduff said he did not consider it was unusual when they shared a bed on their second night to save money, although he had expected to twin beds.

"I didn't think sharing a room with someone was something one could be found out about," he said.

On that evening, Dr Kilduff said they ate dinner together and played cards in the lounge of the Chateau d'Yquem Hotel, and Mr Ashby retired before him. He said they did not discuss which sides of the bed they wished to sleep on, and he did not recall Mr Ashby snoring that night.

Dr Kilduff also denied suggestions that he and Mr Ashby had discussed knocking their two flats into one home. Although he said Mr Ashby had a set of keys to his flat, he said this was normal for a neighbour.

"I can't recall the first day I gave Mr Ashby the keys," Dr Kilduff said. "He certainly has a key now."



In search of the Messiah: Council officials in Glasgow were left frustrated yesterday after thieves stole a sculpture of the baby Jesus from the city's traditional nativity scene in George Square. Councillors have appealed for its return. Photograph: Paul Reid

SEASONS GREETINGS.

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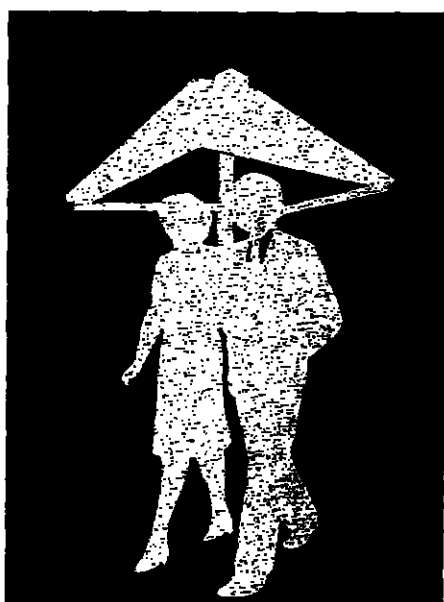
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Banks hit for £1m by complaints watchdog

CLIFFORD GERMAN

The Banking Ombudsman awarded record damages of almost £1m against banks last year in response to complaints from the public, but the number of complaints seems to have peaked according to the ombudsman, Laurence Shurman, in his annual report yesterday.

He received 18,667 telephone calls, approximately the same as in 1994, and 6,723 written complaints, down 16 per cent on the previous year.

The number of complaints that went for investigation also dropped to 717, and of 833 actually investigated during the year, he awarded damages against the banks in 44 per cent of the cases. The smallest award was £10 and the largest £70,000.

Complaints connected with mortgage lending replaced complaints about cash machines as the main concern. The ombudsman condemned banks for overselling loan protection

policies intended to help borrowers pay their mortgage interest if they lost their jobs through illness, accidents or unemployment.

Borrowers complain that mortgage protection plans make policyholders wait too long before starting to pay out, and cover often lasts for only 12 months or less. In many cases they have been sold to people who are not eligible to claim, either because they are self-employed or are working on short-term contracts, with too short a track record to qualify.

Mr Shurman also condemned banks for refusing to refund mortgage indemnity guarantee (MIG) premiums to borrowers who pay off their mortgages early. Borrowers who need to borrow more than 75 per cent of the value of their property are expected to pay a one-off premium of around 5 per cent of the excess they borrow, rising to around 8 per cent if they want to borrow up to

95 per cent of the valuation. The premium is deducted from the advance, and is used to insure the lender against losses if the property has to be repossessed and sold at a loss.

Unlike motor insurance, where part of the premium is refunded if the insurance is cancelled, banks and building societies refuse to refund MIG premiums, which means borrowers with MIG policies are often unable to take advantage of attractive fixed and discount rate mortgages now on offer.

Bank customers can also challenge charges for selling a repossessed property if they feel they are unreasonable, the ombudsman said, even though charges are justified in principle.

But he warned that anyone who discovers an old bank deposit book showing a long-standing credit balance should not expect a windfall. In most cases, bank records show duplicates had been issued and the balances were actually paid off.

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Education policy paper: Teaching unions claim they are being used as political scapegoats in drive to raise standards

Labour's tough line on schools 'is Tory echo'

FRAN ABRAMS
Education Correspondent

Education ministers reacted with glee yesterday to Labour's new, tougher stance on schools, which they said echoed Conservative policies previously condemned by the Opposition. But as the party launched its drive to raise standards in schools, the leadership was accused by teaching unions of using schools as political scapegoats.

Gillian Shephard, Secretary of State for Education and Employment, said Labour was belatedly adopting Tory policy. The party had opposed government plans to introduce inspections, to close failing schools and to set up specialist schools, but now accepted all of them.

"I think it is a pity the Labour Party did not vote to support us when we introduced testing at 7, 11 and 14. But one cheer for the Labour Party for coming on board," she said.

While there was support among the teaching profession for proposals on "super-teach-

Main policy points

- Failing schools to be closed and reopened with new head and governors
- All teachers and heads to be asked more quickly
- A system of targets for better exam results
- A system of better-paid "super-teachers"
- Compulsory professional qualification for all heads
- Teachers' salaries kept in line with the professions to help in recruitment
- Assessment for all five-year-olds
- Minimum standards for all pupils
- Every school to learn foreign languages
- School inspection to be reduced to 30 or less
- Home-school partnerships for all pupils

ers" who will be paid more to stay in the classroom, on smaller classes and on a new emphasis on parental responsibilities, other points were less popular.

Teachers' unions said Mr Blair's figures on failing schools were inaccurate, and insisted that his claim was actually based on the proportion of poor lessons. In any case, they added, a substantial percentage were bound to be below average.

David Hart, general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, supported plans

for teacher-training reforms but suggested much of Labour's paper was politically motivated.

"There is a real danger that schools are becoming the whipping boys of party politics as the main two parties vie with each other to be seen to be tougher on standards," he said.

Doug McAvoy, general secretary of the National Union of Teachers, said most schools had nothing to fear because they were performing well. "It is unfortunate that yet again politicians want to introduce pro-

posals on the back of false claims of mass failure. Sadly, Labour has not lived up to its desire for high standards."

Nigel de Gruchy, general secretary of the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers, said that Labour had not listened hard enough to classroom teachers. Many of them were already under pressure from government initiatives and could not implement Labour's plans without extra resources, he said.

"There are too many signs that Labour has been listening to the professors and directors of education all cowering about at a safe distance, from school and not enough to the 'poor bloody infantry'," he said.

Harry Greenway, Conservative MP for Ealing North and a former languages teacher, denounced plans to teach foreign languages to children from the age of seven. "The simple fact is that it cannot be done because the teachers do not exist to do it. That is why this is a completely dishonest and dishonourable pledge," he said.



Tough talking: Tony Blair launching his schools policy at a press conference in London yesterday. Photograph: Edward Webb

Parties match each other with policies

Labour and the Conservatives are stealing each other's educational clothes so rapidly that it is impossible to establish who owns what.

On exam and test targets for schools, testing for five-year-olds and more training for heads, they are as one. Yesterday, Labour's standards paper promised them. Gillian Shephard, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, has a standard working group looking at targets and has just announced more money to train heads. Earlier this year, John Major promised all five-year-olds would be assessed as soon as new guidelines for the under-fives curriculum were in place.

Both parties want bad teachers reported to heads by school inspectors. Labour, if anything, is more strident than the Conservatives, who have not yet promised to speed up the procedure for getting rid of them.

"Poor teachers cannot, and must not, remain in teaching," the Labour paper says.

Both parties want to close bad schools and the methods that they propose are similar. The Conservatives send in a "hit squad" of education experts who can either close a bad school or sack the head, teachers and governors and help it to improve.

Labour promises "a fresh start" for bad schools, which would be closed down and reopened with a new name, new head and new governors and teachers would be asked to reapply for their jobs. "Pupils in a school that has reached rock bottom do not have the time that it can take for protracted measures to achieve results. It is a positive alternative, therefore, to the Government's hit squad or to a closure."

Even on resources, it is not clear that there would be much more money for education under Labour. Mr Blair says only that the parties have "different priorities" on how the money should be spent. He added that, although the party wanted to make a greater investment in education, that would depend on the state of the economy.

Of course, there are differences between the policies. Labour's qualification for head-teachers would be compulsory. It would abolish the assisted-places scheme, which funds private schooling for bright children from poor homes, and use the money to reduce class sizes for the youngest children to 30 or under. Mrs Shephard

is sceptical about the effect of class size on standards.

Labour would create a new grade of "advanced-skills teacher" to reward those who wished to stay in the classroom. This would be "a professional pace-setter called on by others because of their teaching expertise."

David Blunkett, the opposition spokesman on Education, has stolen a march on Mrs Shephard over homework. The standards paper promises clear guidelines to ensure that primary-school children do half an hour a night and secondary pupils an hour and a half.

School inspection, too, would be different under Labour with local authority inspectors involved alongside members of central teams. There would be more advice after an inspection.

A General Teaching Council to improve the profession's status is proposed and school funding would be reviewed.

What difference would Labour's policies make? Less than Mr Blair and Mr Blunkett would like. Experts agree that target setting, better training for heads and rewards for classroom teachers are all important ways of raising standards.

But the paper's biggest flaw is assuming central government has more power than it does to influence events in the schools.

Ministers cannot sack teachers. Only heads and governors can. Unless the Employment Protection Act is changed - and Labour says it will stay - schools cannot sack teachers more quickly than they do now. Nine months, the figure used in the paper for the time it takes to sack a teacher, is an underestimate. Two years is more realistic.

Setting pupils in different subjects according to ability, which the paper favours, cannot be imposed centrally.

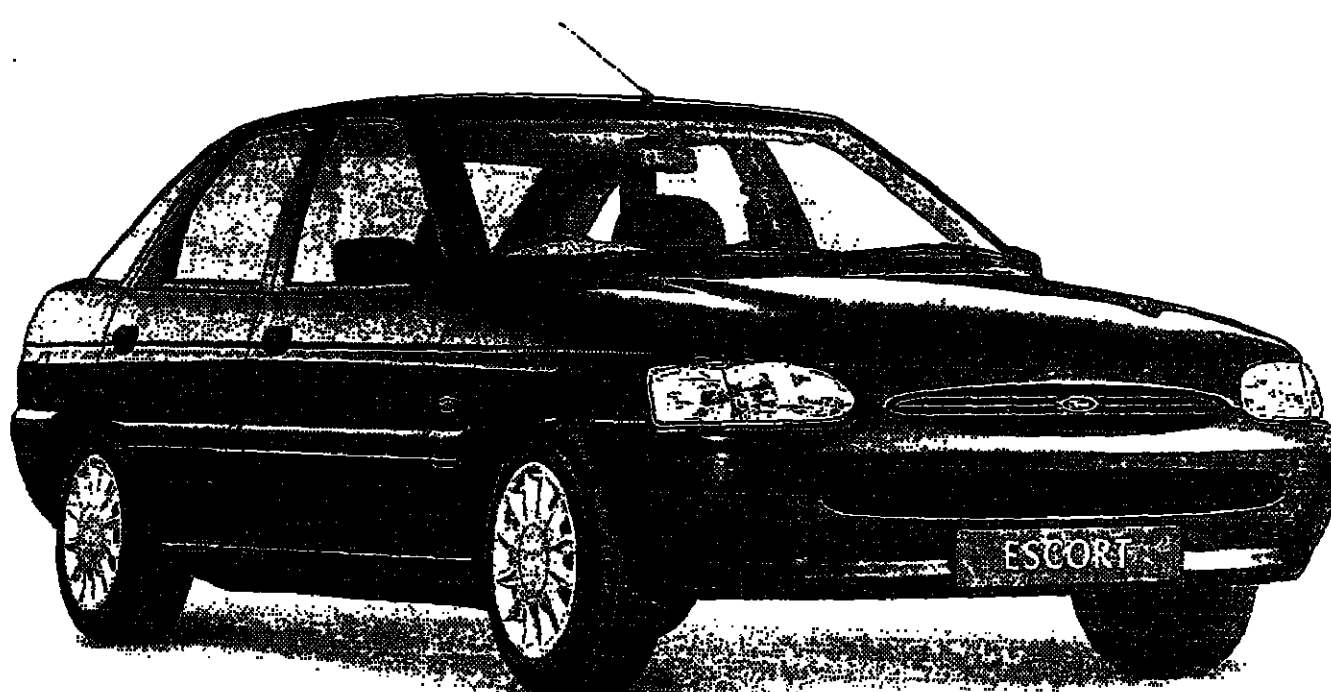
Teaching modern languages in primary schools will be difficult when there is already a shortage of language teachers in secondary schools.

Even where change can be imposed, Labour has to tread warily. Mr Blair talks about pressure on teachers and support for them. It is a tricky balance to achieve. And yesterday there was more evidence of pressure than support.

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politics

Defence spending: Committee calls for bias towards Europe

MPs call for bar on American weapons

CHRIS BLACKHURST
Westminster Correspondent

Buying weapons and military hardware from the United States is a short-term policy that benefits only US corporations, it was claimed by an influential group of MPs yesterday.

In a hard-hitting report that fired a shot across the bows of policy advisers in the Ministry of Defence who have been leaning towards US arms manufacturers, the cross-party Commons Trade and Industry Committee recommended looking to Europe.

Coming hard on the heels of revelations about mounting cost over-runs on the Eurofighter joint-European project, and reports of the growing influence within the MoD of David Hart, the independent adviser to Michael Portillo, the Secretary of State for Defence, the committee's report causes an embarrassment for ministers.

"While we believe that nothing should be done to prevent

UK firms from collaborating with US firms where this is mutually advantageous, we regard greater European collaboration as crucial to the survival of the defence industries of the UK and other European countries."

To this end, said the committee in its first study of UK defence procurement strategy: "We recommend that the UK Government takes a more prominent role in creating a European defence market involving greater collaboration at government and company levels in R & D [research and development], production and marketing, with the aim of eliminating inappropriate duplication and subsidies."

It was essential, concluded the MPs, that the UK is a full participant in a European armaments agency proposed by France and Germany.

With MoD arms buying at present in disarray – the ministry is seeking a successor to Dr Malcolm McIntosh, the head of defence procurement, who is

taking up a new post in Australia – and under severe pressure following a series of damning reports from the National Audit Office, the public spending watchdog, the committee report poses severe problems for Mr Portillo.

Recommendations like "Given the potential savings from the promotion of the European defence market, we would wish to see a more ambitious approach..." cannot be music to the ears of the avowedly Euro-sceptic Mr Portillo.

The committee's concern was prompted by a fall in Government defence spending of 25 per cent over the past decade and pressure being put on UK suppliers by the MoD, anxious to get more value for money.

Against that, companies were also having to compete with a US industry which has seen a number of takeovers and alliances producing greater savings and economies of scale.

With the US becoming an ever more aggressive exporter

and countries of the former Soviet Union anxious to sell weapons in return for hard currency there was a risk, MPs said, that the UK could lose markets and "as a result, significant defence manufacturing capacity and capabilities".

It was vital, the committee said, that the Government "adopt a more active policy to secure fair access for UK firms to overseas defence markets and the removal of subsidies to foreign defence manufacturers".

The Department of Trade and Industry should be given a greater role in procurement and, "as a matter of urgency", complete a joint study with the Department of Employment into what happens to redundant workers from the defence industry.

The findings of the inquiry, which should concentrate on the loss to Britain of highly skilled scientists and engineers, should be reported to the House of Commons, the committee added.



No shelter: Sir George Young, Secretary of State for Transport (left), and William Hague, Secretary of State for Wales, on the Second Severn Crossing, completed yesterday. A windshield is to be built on the bridge. Photograph: Christopher Jones

Heseltine says Labour intends to raise top rate to 60p in the pound

Tax claims generate more heat than light

Michael Heseltine, the Deputy Prime Minister, yesterday claimed Labour was planning a top rate of income tax of 60p in the pound as the Budget debate ended much as it began – with both sides trying to brand the other as the "high-tax party".

There's nothing new about the Labour Party," Mr Heseltine declared. But there was nothing new about the Deputy PM either as he offered the House a pale imitation of his Labour-bashing extravaganzas of yesteryear.

John Prescott seemed almost pained that Mr Heseltine had delivered a speech "more appropriate to a circus" rather than concentrating on the serious issues of the Budget. But the Labour deputy took the gloves off too, dismissing Mr Heseltine as a "cheap propagandist" for the Tory party and a "has-been hop-along deputy". He found it "particularly offensive" when millionaires like Mr Heseltine attacked people who desperately needed a minimum wage.

Much of the debate revolved around the Government's claim, rather loosely put by Mr Heseltine, that the Budget "will deliver an extra £9 a week" to the average earner.

Alan Beith, the Liberal Democrat economics spokesman, and Mr Prescott both seized on the figure asking if it assumed a 4 per cent average pay increase. If teachers were to get such an increase it would eat up the extra £878m the Government had promised for schools, suggested Mr Beith.

"Here's the Government telling us that they have a 4 per cent pay policy," Mr Prescott said. The claim brought Kenneth Clarke, the Chancellor, to his feet to clarify matters.

The figure given by ministers that the average family with one wage-earner and two children would be £450 better off next year was based on Treasury assumptions about earnings, inflation and the effect of the Budget changes. "The best forecast that can be made is that next year the average family will be £9 a week better off."

Eclipsing his colleague, the Chancellor asked if £9 a week was not good enough, what changes would Labour make. "This whole nonsense is based on the assumption that the Labour Party have got an opinion one way or the other about the changes we have made in personal taxation."

"It isn't a difficult question for the shadow Chancellor [Gordon Brown was at Mr Prescott's elbow]," Mr Clarke said. "Are they in favour of the changes we have made in personal taxation or are they against, or haven't they an idea in their head until a soundbite is suggested by Peter Mandelson?"

In a series of votes at the close of the debate, the official Labour line was to abstain on

a motion setting the income tax rates for 1996-97, including the 1p reduction in the basic rate to 24p in the pound.

Labour has opposed every other reduction in income tax since 1979. But Mr Brown told the Commons that people had "suffered enough". The Liberal Democrats opposed the cut.

Mr Heseltine's assertion that Labour was planning a higher top rate sprang from a Commons written answer put down on 2 November by the frontbencher Nigel Griffiths, Labour MP for Edinburgh South, asking the Chancellor what the yield would be from a 60 per cent upper rate.

To Tory cheers, the Deputy Prime Minister demanded: "What possible interest has a shadow Treasury spokesman of

Inside Parliament

Stephen Goodwin

the Parliamentary Labour Party got in asking the Treasury to calculate what is the product of a 60 per cent upper rate tax band? Is it idle curiosity, or is it to help with the arithmetic?"

With Labour MPs calling out that Mr Griffiths was a trade and industry spokesman, Mr Heseltine added: "If I have revealed that I wasn't sure he was a Treasury spokesman, have I revealed something else – that there's a split within the Labour front bench between the Treasury trying to keep expenditure down and some other departmental responsibility trying to find the money to pay for increased expenditure? I don't mind which way it is."

"All I tell the people of this country: Labour is planning a 60 per cent tax rate and they're doing the calculations on that basis."

With snow falling outside the Palace of Westminster, Labour made a well-timed – if doomed – return to the issue of VAT on domestic fuel. Commending an amendment to cut the 8 per cent tax, Mr Prescott said that if the Chancellor really had money to spare it would have been fairer on the low-paid and pensioners to cut their heating bills. And the £30m taken off energy conservation in the Budget could have been used to provide decent jobs on schemes to insulate pensioners' homes.

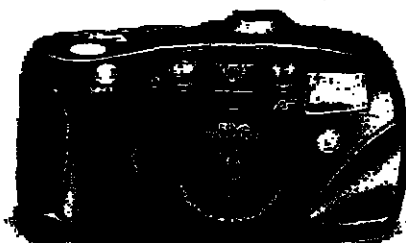
"Today's weather reminds us that pensioners can't afford to turn up their heat quite so easily as we can in the House of Commons," Mr Prescott said, seemingly unconscious of the metaphor.



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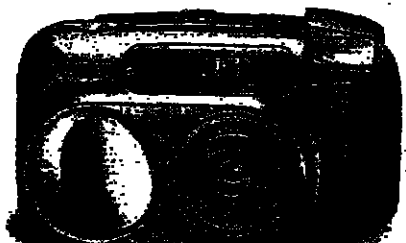
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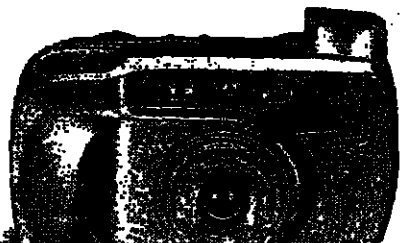
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Public health scare: Parents keep children away from lessons as hospital reports steep increase in incidence of illness

Meningitis hits third pupil as school closes

LIZ HUNT
Health Editor

West Yorkshire: Two pupils at the Emley First School, Huddersfield, with meningococcal meningitis. Throat swabs collected from all 115 pupils and staff and antibiotics given. This follows four similar cases in the nearby Dewsbury area: two girls, 8 and 10, were from the Overthorpe Junior and Infant School. Antibiotics given and swabs taken.

Leeds: 21 year old student at University dies last week. A 16 year old boy and a baby also ill. Also confirmed yesterday that two children aged 6, pupils at the Our Lady of Good Counsel School, Seacroft, Leeds, have meningitis. School remains open.

London: A 16 year old pupil from the Godolphin and Lister school in Hammersmith is recovering from meningitis.

Croydon: Three cases at the Wolsey Infant and Junior School, New Addington. All have meningococcal septicaemia. School closed until next Monday including nursery.

Cleveland: A four year old boy died from meningitis on Friday, a pupil at Palister Park Primary at Middlesbrough, and less than a quarter of pupils turned up for school yesterday as a result.

Lincolnshire: Five deaths and two recovering. First case early October. Three teenage pupils at the City School infected, 2 fatalities. School closed for just under a week as more than 700 staff and pupils are given antibiotics and throat swabs are collected. Tests reveal that four of the teenagers who died were friends and probably passed on infection through normal social contact. Three of the seven cases found to be caused by strain C of the bacterium which there is a vaccine for, so vaccination offered to pupils and staff.

Danger areas: Overthorpe, Dewsbury (left) and Lincoln School

A primary school in Croydon, south London, where three children have developed meningitis-related blood poisoning, has closed temporarily after scores of anxious parents kept children at home yesterday.

In the latest in a series of outbreaks which have alarmed parents, a 10-year-old boy from the Wolsey Junior and Infant school in New Addington, has died, and an eight-year-old girl is now recovering in intensive care.

Croydon Health Commissioning Agency yesterday confirmed that a third pupil from the junior school is ill with meningococcal septicaemia, a form of blood poisoning caused by the meningitis bacterium. Two of the pupils are in the same year. The death rate from meningococcal septicaemia is one in five, compared with a death rate of one in ten for meningococcal meningitis.

During 1995 there has been a 50 per cent increase in the number of suspected or confirmed cases of meningococcal disease in the Croydon area, and GPs were warned to be increasingly vigilant for symptoms during the winter months when the disease peaks.

However, Dr John Thomas, a consultant in Public Health Medicine at Croydon Health, said that it was "quite unusual" to have three pupils infected at the same school in such a short time span. Tests are under way to see if the cases are linked, and preventive antibiotic treatment has been recommended for all junior school pupils.

Public health officials in West Yorkshire have also confirmed meningitis in two pupils at the Emley First School in Huddersfield. One child was admitted to the Huddersfield Royal Infirmary over the weekend, and the other is at the Pinderfields Hospital, in Wakefield. The school remains open but throat swabs will be taken from the 110 pupils and 15 staff today and they will be offered antibiotics.

The Huddersfield outbreak follows four cases in the nearby Dewsbury area, including two girls, aged nine and 10, who were pupils at the Overthorpe Junior and Infant School. More than 450 pupils and staff were last week given preventive antibiotic treatment.

In Leeds, two six-year-old pupils at the Our Lady of Good Counsel primary school, in Seacroft, have been confirmed with meningitis but the school will remain open.

A 21-year-old student at Leeds University died of meningitis last week, believed to be the 10th death from the disease in the city this year. A 16-year-old boy and a baby are recovering from the illness. Ray Thompson, of the National Meningitis Trust, said yesterday that cases were running at between 17 and 20 per cent up on last year and the number of deaths was likely to top 2000.

At St Mary's Hospital, in London, which runs one of the few meningitis "crash" teams in the UK, a spokesman said cases had increased on last year. Between 1 November and 5 December, the hospital had treated 24 cases compared with nine in the same period in 1994.

Judges back Howard over life sentences

STEPHEN WARD
Legal Affairs Correspondent

Michael Howard, the Home Secretary, successfully appealed yesterday against one of his many court-room defeats.

Mr Howard, who is also in open conflict with the judiciary over his plans to remove some of judges' discretion on sentencing, was told last month by Lord Justice Turner in the High Court that he had "failed to measure up to the required standard of fairness" when he increased the minimum life sentence of a murderer from 15 to 20 years.

But yesterday in the Court of Appeal, the Master of the Rolls, Sir Thomas Bingham, together with Lord Justice Neill and Lord Justice Hirst, set aside Mr Justice Turner's ruling and said that the Home Secretary's decision to increase the sentence could not be "stigmatised as irrational". The case may now go to the Lords.

The appeal judges stressed in their judgment that they were not concerned whether John Pierson—who was jailed for life in 1985 for the "horrific and apparently motiveless" murder of his parents—should serve 15 or 20 years and they had no part to play in making that decision.

"It is none of our business, and we have no views on the subject. Nor are we in any way called upon to consider the allocation of sentencing powers between the executive and the judiciary. That again is none of our business."

"We are concerned, and concerned only, to rule upon the lawfulness of the decision."

They also made clear that the case was not a challenge to the Home Secretary personally and, although he is named as the person appealing to the court, this was only because he is the secretary of state responsible for the department.

The judge at Pierson's trial, and the then Lord Chief Justice, Lord Lane, recommended that the "tariff" Pierson must serve for retribution and deterrence should be set at 15 years. But Pierson, who maintained his innocence, was told in August 1993 that the Home Secretary had increased his minimum sentence to 20 years.

Mr Howard has been overruled by the courts in fewer than 10 per cent of judicial review challenges since he became Home Secretary in 1993.

Baroness Blatch, Minister of State at the Home Office, told the House of Lords yesterday. She said the cost of defending his decisions in court had been "about £2m" in 1994-95.

Firms attacked for not tackling stress

Workplace stress is a problem in nine out of ten organisations, according to a survey to be published by the Industrial Society highlighting the cost to business.

Managers believe stress has become an integral part of most jobs, which is "deeply disturbing", according to Tony Morgan, chief executive of the society. "Firms are doing dangerously little to tackle the problem," he said.

"The damaging flu epidemic now afflicting the UK is nothing compared with the cost to business of the stress epidemic," he said at an industrial journalism awards ceremony, sponsored by Texaco.

Mr Morgan also said a radical solution, such as appraisal by employees or even customers, was needed to defuse the continuing controversy over executive pay.

The industrial journalism award winner for national newspapers was Robert Taylor, of the Financial Times. The regional winner was Peter Cunliffe, of the Yorkshire Post.

DAILY POEM

Reading the Deer

By MR Peacocke

In the new plantation below the house:
young snow; and the record of deer.

Each foot drove slantwise to the brown,
clearing over a white quill.
Here they plaited a track.
Unravelling here - three, four -
scrapped away, pulled up moss,
dropped buttercup leaves, bit plantain.
Black grouse leapt up here,
primaries smacking the drift
in sharp fangs; did the roe startle?
Now by the alders; the broken wall:
the ditch rank with mint. One dawdled,
stepping aside; willow twigs nipped off.
Lost now under birches and hazels
where snow has scarcely lodged,
skinning to the beck through wet clay.

A shift in air. Broad flakes begin,
filling and blurring patterned tracks of boots
that have trampled the path of the deer.

MR Peacocke lives on a hill farm in Cumbria which she works as a smallholding. Her first collection *Marginal Land* (Peterloo) was published in 1988 to warm applause, her voice being likened to Larkin in its "plain language, strong rhythms, full rhymes". A second collection *Selves* appeared this autumn (Peterloo, £5.95). It is a town and country collection with an old-fashioned air and includes a short history of the *Thé Dansant*, a tribute to Jean Muir, and a hypnotic *Goose Hymn*.

ÉGOÏSTE
PLATINUM
CHANEL

Problem housing estates: Charity calls for radical government strategy to tackle downward spiral of poverty and lawlessness

'Give power to the people to combat squalor'

GLENDA COOPER

Britain's 2,000 worst housing estates can be saved from a downward spiral of poverty and lawlessness by introducing a radical 20-year strategy handing power back to tenants, an independent charitable foundation said yesterday.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation wants the Government to set up a community resource fund to give local people access to specialist advice, training and running costs after dramatic improvements in estates where tenants became involved.

The foundation has funded a £1.5m research programme in over 100 estates over the past two years called Action on Estates. Poverty emerged as the root cause of many problems.

Earlier this year the foundation's report on income and wealth estimated that the gap between rich and poor was at its widest for 50 years. In the council sector the number of economically inactive households is now a majority; only 41 per cent of household heads had jobs in 1991 compared with 59 per cent in 1979.

One in four children in secondary schools that serve difficult-to-let estates achieve no



Sign of the times: A pair of semi-detached houses on the Halton Moor estate, in Leeds, one derelict and the other newly refurbished

GCSEs compared to 1 in 20 nationally, and truanting is four times higher than average.

The problems of poverty are exacerbated by stereotyping. Estates suffer from "postcode

discrimination: taxi drivers and delivery vans will not go there, employers lose interest once addresses are quoted and it is almost impossible to get loans from financial institutions.

Marilyn Taylor, author of the report, *Unleashing the Potential: Bringing residents to the centre of regeneration*, said: "Such extremes of disadvantage and social stigma place huge

pressure on family and community life and can create breeding grounds for loneliness and despair, racial harassment and crime."

But estates where the residents are in charge of day-to-day running have been transformed. Last year, 10 members of a gang from the Pennywell estate in Sunderland were jailed for a total of 57 years after al-

most killing a traffic policeman. Recently an initiative called Pride in Pennywell opened with a carnival attracting 5,000 people. The scheme has a newspaper and a radio show on Wear

FM to publicise activities; Halton Moor, in Leeds, famous for joyriding, is halfway through renovations of its 1,100 properties; and Meadowell, in North Shields, the scene of riots, has a new youth centre built by a co-operative formed by local young people.

The report concludes that while it is crucial for residents to play a vital role, the Government must show the way by introducing a national strategy and starting a rolling programme of targeted investment. Money could be found from existing grants, the National Lottery or local business.

Government departments such as the Benefits Agency and DSS should also co-operate. "We want an enabling central government that allows resources to be released in the way local agencies feel is most appropriate," Ms Taylor said.

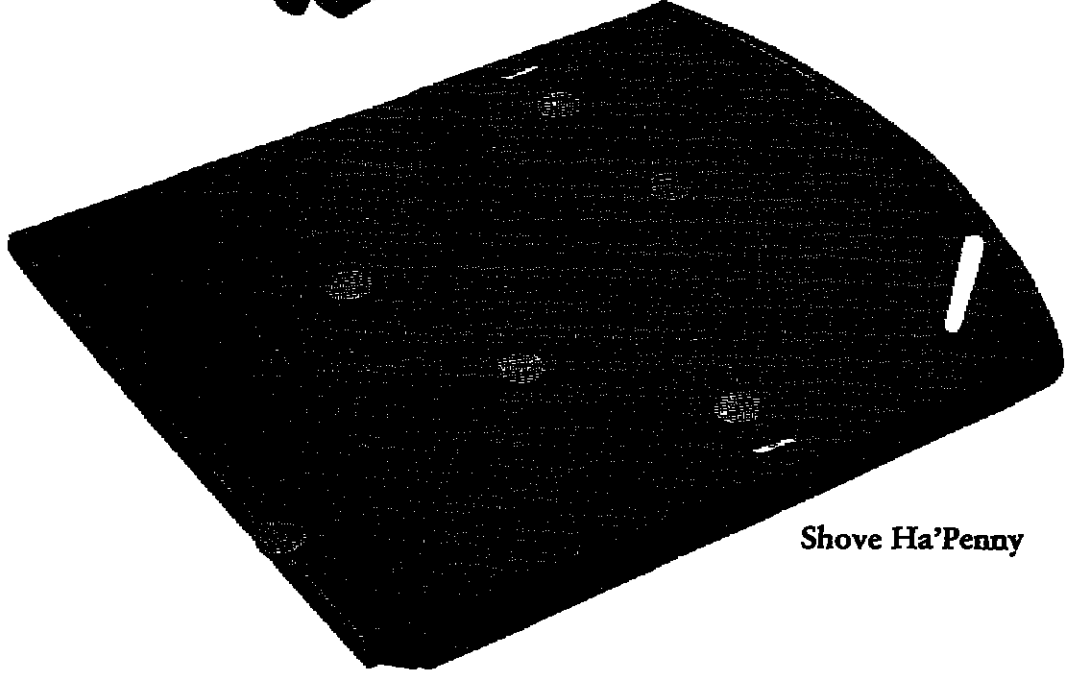
The positive message... is that targeting multiple disadvantaged neighbourhoods over a period of time and involving local people in the tasks of regeneration can produce significant improvements." ■ *Unleashing the Potential: Bringing residents to the centre of regeneration*; Joseph Rowntree Foundation; £10.50 & £1 p&p.

Photograph: Simon Wilkinson

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Bagatelle



Shove Ha'Penny

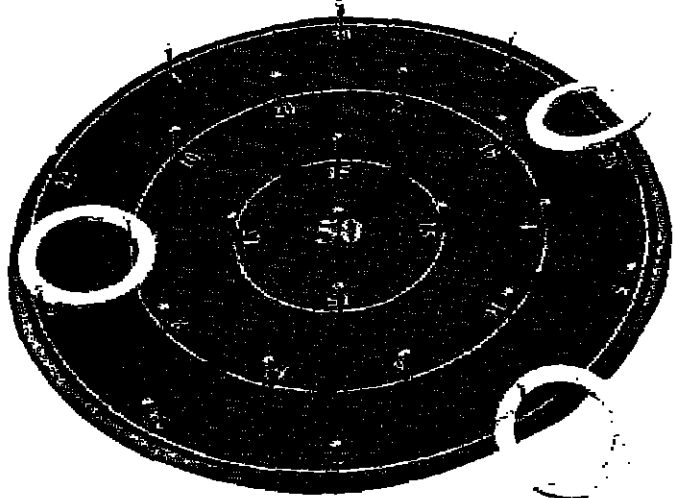


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Shove Ha'Penny

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Tenants find a fresh pride

Three years ago the Leeds estate Halton Moor attracted national notoriety with its joyriding problem, writes Glenda Cooper. Police accused young people of trying to kill officers by deliberately ramming stolen vehicles into police cars.

In the 12 months leading up to January 1993, 230 stolen vehicles were set on fire by young people on the estate. There were six specific incidents of joyriders trying to kill or injure police officers during a three-week period.

But those on the estate management board of Halton Moor, which came into operation in 1993, say that the estate no longer lives up to lurid newspaper headlines - if indeed it ever did.

Margaret Wilson, vice-chairwoman of the board, said they had applied for £23m in funding from the Government in order to improve the estate and make it somewhere to be proud of.

"We started off with the outside - the roofs, windows," she said. "And then we gave them garden walls and drives and parking bays."

"Then we went in and re-did the insides, with fitted kitchens and bathrooms... And most importantly we let people choose what they wanted inside

their houses so they felt they had some control over their lives and for the first time could have what they really liked."

The board has so far completed half of the 1,100 properties but are not stopping there. They have also organised an outreach worker to try to help the young unemployed get jobs and have set up environmental groups planting more greenery around the estate. Traffic has been slowed down with anti-speed devices.

"It makes the tenants have more pride in the area in which they live," Ms Wilson said. "They feel they have an investment now for the future. We have volunteers for our youth club and our after-school club."

Police started work several years ago on a football scheme and have helped on estate improvements such as lockable windows and closed-circuit TV.

And the problems that have haunted Halton, such as the joy riding? "It's very quiet now on Halton Moor," Ms Wilson said firmly. "The press coverage in 1993 I didn't think was justified. Yes there were incidents but it was very different to the way it was set up in the press. We have a very good relationship with the police and each other now."

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Sell-off row: Labour claims cash for improvements is being lost

Railtrack 'starving network of investment'

DONALD MACINTYRE and CHRISTIAN WOLMAR

The Rail Regulator is seeking assurances from Railtrack about its investment plans after the *Independent's* disclosure that the state-owned company has set aside £1.14bn in advance of privatisation rather than spend it on railway maintenance and improvement.

The move is disclosed in a letter from the regulator, John Swift QC, to Brian Wilson, shadow transport minister, who had protested that Railtrack's annual accounts had disclosed that the money had been set aside to "boost its pre-privatisation balance sheet" when it could have been spent on the

that Railtrack does indeed have plans in place to achieve the increase in expenditure, particularly in 1996-7, needed to start addressing the shortfalls in expenditure levels.

"The form and content of Railtrack's statutory accounts are for the directors and the company's auditors to determine, not for the regulator. But I will want to ensure that the accounts provide the necessary information to allow me, Railtrack's customers, and others with a legitimate interest to understand the underlying financial position of the company."

Mr Swift says that he will especially "want to ensure that Railtrack continues to disclose expenditure on asset maintenance and renewal... so that any change in levels of expenditure or adjustments to the provisions made this year is clear to readers of the accounts".

It also emerged yesterday that two out of three Tory MPs accept that rail privatisation is electorally unpopular.

The survey of 51 Tory MPs for the pressure group Save Our Railways also interviewed 42 Labour and seven other MPs for the pressure group Save Our Railways. It also found that nine Tory MPs would welcome a rethink on the issue which was introduced by the Railways Act 1993.

While three-quarters of Conservative MPs believe that standards will improve, nearly all the Labour members and other MPs hold the opposite view.

The group's co-ordinator, Jonathan Bray, said: "The late Tory MP Robert Adley's prediction that privatisation would be a 'poll tax on wheels' is now coming true."

Tomorrow the High Court will hear the judicial review of the franchising process brought by Save Our Railways. The Liberal Democrat MP for North Devon, Nick Harvey, and the Labour MP for York, Hugh Bailey, will give evidence at the hearing which will focus on whether promises to Parliament on protecting existing services have been broken.

The survey of 100 MPs was conducted by Business and Planning Research International on behalf of Connect Public Affairs, for the group.



Brian Wilson. Asked to probe into firm's accounts

nation's "cash-starved railways". Mr Wilson pressed the regulator to ensure that the money paid to Railtrack by rail operators after privatisation in access charges would be used for the purpose for which they had been originally intended: namely investment and maintenance of track and signalling.

Mr Wilson called last night for the postponement of Railtrack's privatisation until "all questions relating to their accounts are resolved". He added: "It will be a monstrous fraud upon the taxpayer and passengers if they are allowed to carry the proceeds of this billion pound underspend into the private sector."

In his letter, Mr Swift says: "While one year's expenditure figures should not be taken in isolation, I will want to be clear

Huge inquiry to assess safety of Railtrack

CHRISTIAN WOLMAR
Transport Correspondent

The Railways Inspectorate has launched its biggest investigation, involving all its 25 field rail inspectors, to assess the safety of the new structure of the railway following the creation of Railtrack.

The inspectorate took this unprecedented action after a series of leaked documents this summer relating to the relationship between Railtrack and its contractors raised fears that safety was being compromised. Alan Cooksey, Deputy Chief Inspector of the Railways, said that the report being prepared would be published in January and added that the inspectorate had admonished Railtrack for failing to supply all documents relating to these incidents.

If the report even hints that safety concerns have not been properly addressed, the privatisation of Railtrack, scheduled for next spring, could be delayed. One of the leaks quoted a Railtrack safety official, Jack Rose, saying that Railtrack needed "18 months" before its safety systems were ready for privatisation. Concern about the safety implications of privatisation was also highlighted in the annual report of the Railways Inspectorate for the year up to 1 April 1995, published yesterday, which warned of "uncertainties and risks if [privatisation] is not managed properly".

While there is no evidence from the statistics in the report that the breakdown of the railways in April 1994, with British Rail being split into more than 100 units, has led to a reduction in safety standards, Sir Robertson, Chief Inspector of the Railways

warned that there was "no reason for being complacent". He warned that within the restructured railway "many more companies will be pressing their own interests" and therefore "the industry will have to take steps to ensure that the safety management system is complete, cohesive and totally effective."

The inspectorate is also to assess whether Railtrack is justified in reducing the number of emergency-response trains from 13 to 5. According to Railtrack, these trains, used to recover derailed rolling stock, are now required less often as there are fewer derailments. However, the annual report says that "significant" derailments increased from 87 to 107.

Evidence from the first year of operation after the creation of Railtrack shows that the safety record was about the same as the previous year, the best on record. The number of train accidents fell from 977 in 1993/94 to 907 in 1994/95, with significant accidents—those potentially the most dangerous to passengers—falling by eight to 110.

The total number of people killed on the railways, excluding trespassers and suicides, rose by two to 42 and fatal accidents to passengers increased from 16 to 17. Staff killed on all railways increased from eight to nine, and 13 level-crossing users were killed, one fewer than in the previous year.

A total of 254 trespassers were killed, including 120 suicides and six children under 16 compared with corresponding figures the previous year respectively of 262, 141 and eight. Mr Robertson said that none of these changes represented "statistically significant fluctuations".



Snow trail: A couple walking in Limpsfield, Surrey, yesterday as heavy snow hit Britain in the first icy chill of the season. East Anglia, Kent and Cambridgeshire saw the biggest snowfalls as forecasters predicted worse to come. The snow was caused by an easterly airstream which originated in the steppes of Siberia. Photograph: Andrew Dunsmore

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news

Thornton 'said she would kill husband'

HEATHER MILLS
Home Affairs Correspondent

Three days before Sara Thornton fatally stabbed her drunken and violent husband, she had told a friend she was going to kill him, the Court of Appeal heard yesterday.

The following day, her stepson had to intervene and force her to drop a kitchen knife she was pointing at her husband - the same knife she later used to kill him. She also gave her husband an overdose of Mogadon tranquilliser tablets, crushed up in some cooked chicken.

Urging the appeal judges to reject Thornton's appeal, the prosecuting counsel Brian Escott QC said there was "an extremely strong case for the prosecution on murder".

Thornton, 38, of Atherstone, Warwickshire, was jailed for life in February 1990 for murdering her husband Malcolm, a former policeman, with a single thrust of the kitchen knife as he lay in a drunken stupor on a sofa. Her original appeal on the grounds that she was "provoked" was rejected in 1991.

But her case was referred back to the court after new evidence emerged, indicating she was suffering from "battered woman syndrome" and a personality disorder which together made her vulnerable and liable to suddenly "snap" under the stress of repeated abuse from her alcoholic husband.

But yesterday Mr Escott QC said the evidence "mitigates very

strongly against this being a true case of provocation". He claimed Thornton was not a woman with "a long-term history of being a battered wife". The violence and threats to which she had been subjected had, he claimed, been "sporadic" and occurred over a short period - between the autumn of 1987, when the couple started living together, until Mr Thornton's death in June 1989.

Three days before the killing, Mr Escott QC told the court, Thornton had told a friend "she was not prepared to give anything up" for her husband and was going to kill him.

On the night of the killing, he said she was in a difficult mood and had written in lipstick on the dressing-table mirror: "Bastard Thornton, I hate you."

Mr Escott QC said the stabbing itself did not involve raised voices, or a frenzied attack, but one "clinical blow".

But Michael Mansfield QC, for Thornton, said there was evidence showing that she had suffered abuse over a period of time which, coming on top of her vulnerable personality, had caused her to snap when her husband had called her a whore and threatened to kill her.

Last night, Thornton's hopes of being cleared hung in the balance after the appeal judges, led by Lord Taylor of Gosforth, the Lord Chief Justice, reserved their decision. However they agreed to renew her bail pending their judgment, expected before Christmas.

Pollution blackspot: Lottery cash sought to help heal shameful scars of industrial vandalism



Boy on the black stuff: Like others in County Durham, the beach at Horden is covered in thousands of tonnes of coallery waste

Photograph: North News

Coal-ravaged coast in line for £13m clean-up

NICHOLAS SCHOON
Environment Correspondent

One of Britain's more shameful eyesores - the black beaches along the coast, smothering the sand in black deposits several metres deep. The waste extended the beaches 100 yards or more out to sea. For nine miles the inshore waters are stained black and the foam in breaking waves is grey. All life on the sea-bed has been wiped out.

One-hundred million tonnes of coallery waste were tipped over the cliffs on to the beach-

es below from the six mines of the East Durham coalfield. Currents spread the material along the coast, smothering the sand in black deposits several metres deep. The waste extended the beaches 100 yards or more out to sea. For nine miles the inshore waters are stained black and the foam in breaking waves is grey. All life on the sea-bed has been wiped out.

Until two years ago, a giant conveyor belt at the Easington pit carried waste a short distance from the cliffs while bulldozers spread it over the beach. It resembled an industrial scene from behind the Iron Curtain before communism's collapse.

For decades a succession of ministers, councillors and expert bodies said it was a shame and a disgrace. But nothing was

done to end the tipping because British Coal claimed it could not identify or afford any alternative. The Government declined to fund any solution.

Tipping ceased with the demise of the East Durham coal industry, and nature has now begun its own clean-up. Easington was the last of the pits to shut, in 1993, and its infamous conveyor has been demolished. The sea is eroding the thick layer of sticky, clay-like coal waste and working its way back towards the limestone cliffs.

Durham County Council and seven other local and national bodies want to speed up the restoration, bring wildflowers back to the cliffs and make

the vandalised coast a place that hundreds of thousands of people visit every year. The beaches, and the steep-sided little valleys which run down to them, are now used for fly-tipping and dumping stolen cars.

The partners have applied to the Millennium Commission for £5.3m of lottery money. Their proposals, costing a total of £13m, have made it on to the commission's shortlist and a decision is expected later this month.

The most expensive item is the removal of two waste tips on the beaches, using bulldozers and drag-lines. If they are left there, the returning sea will reach them in a few years, caus-

ing further damaging pollution. The next largest expense is the building of six new railway stations on the under-used coastal line which connects Tyneside and Teesside. Today there is only one halt and it is difficult to get to much of the coast by car. But people would be able to walk straight down to the beach or on to the cliffs from the new stations, or hire bicycles to ride on the planned network of cycle paths.

Development is to be kept to an absolute minimum. "There will be no bungalows, no funfairs and nothing but the sun, the wind and the unpredictable North Sea," says the botanist David Bellamy, a keen supporter.

Development is to be kept to an absolute minimum. "There will be no bungalows, no funfairs and nothing but the sun, the wind and the unpredictable North Sea," says the botanist David Bellamy, a keen supporter.

TUC in pension-rights battle

BARRIE CLEMENT

The TUC is expected to appeal against the rejection yesterday of claims for backdated pension benefits on behalf of 60,000 part-time workers, most of whom are women.

An industrial tribunal in Birmingham decided it would not be possible for them to claim any pension beyond the two-year limit already established. The total backdated award could amount to £95m, according to the TUC.

The claims - submitted on behalf of part-timers in the NHS, banking, education, the local authority sector and the power supply industry - are now likely to go before the Employment Appeals Tribunal.

The judgment by the Birmingham tribunal also indicated that some of the cases might be "out of time".

While the tribunal argued that applications should have been submitted within six months of the end of the contract of employment in question,

James Goudie, counsel for the TUC, said the relevant period was the six months after a key European Court judgment in September last year that employers who barred part-time workers from pension schemes could be guilty of indirect sex discrimination. Proceedings had been started within that period, he said.

John Monks, TUC general secretary, said: "The TUC determined that employers should not be let off the hook for past discrimination."

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Survey finds bank errors still 'unacceptably high'

GORDON MILNE

BANKS are making fewer mistakes - but a quarter of customers still find errors in their current account, according to a

Bank of Scotland, Midland and Lloyds ranked only average in terms of customer satisfaction, with Clydesdale below average. Barclays and NatWest were bottom of the table.

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صكا من الامل

France in revolt: Juppé talks tough but offers olive branch of postponing 1996 tax reforms



Violent fringe: Cars being overturned at the end of a peaceful trade-union demonstration in Paris

Photograph: Jean-Christophe Kahn/Reuters

First signs of compromise emerge

MARY DEJEVSKY
Paris

The 12-day-old crisis in France came to a head yesterday with demonstrations across the country, the extension of public sector strikes into the private sector, and the Prime Minister, Alain Juppé, refusing to withdraw his welfare reforms.

Amid the general chaos, however, there were small signs that both sides were tentatively looking for an acceptable way out. Mr Juppé mounted a strident defence of his reforms as he spoke in the National Assembly, where he was answering a censure motion tabled by Socialist MPs, but he clarified the distinction between the structural reforms of the welfare system and the special pension rights of different branches of the public sector. These, he said, would not be touched. He had

made the same point at a preparatory meeting with MPs from the Gaullist-led coalition.

These "special regimes", which include early retirement deals for train drivers and miners, sparked the original protests. Public-sector workers feared their rights would be abolished by a government commission set up to consider how public and private sector pension arrangements could be made fairer.

The government also appeared to offer another olive branch, by saying that it would postpone a major element of a tax reform planned for 1996.

It was unclear, however, how far these concessions would be successful in defusing the protests. And, for the French public, they were largely obscured by Mr Juppé's fierce rhetoric in the National Assembly, in which he spoke in

Thatcherite terms of there being "no alternative" to the reforms. He said: "Yes, France can and must embark boldly on the road to reforms which have been delayed too long."

But earlier, speaking to government deputies in a private meeting, he was reported to have said that the "door was open" to negotiations.

"I do not have the intention to commit suicide. I am courageous, but not reckless," Mr Juppé said. Union leaders also said they were prepared to negotiate.

Government concessions may be too late to defuse what have become highly personalised protests whose chief target is not just the "Juppé plan", but Mr Juppé himself.

This was the main chant of several hundred thousand demonstrators who took to the streets of French cities yesterday in some of the biggest demonstrations seen in France since the student revolt of 1968. More than 50,000 turned out in Paris despite perishing temperatures and the first snowfall of winter.

One source of consolation for the government – and the first sign in the past week that they

might yet have a chance of victory – was the sharp diminution by two-thirds of the traffic jams into Paris in the morning rush-hour; Monday had seen a record total of 600km at a standstill.

The drop probably reflected, in part, people's decision to stay at home to avoid demonstra-

tions and weather, as the transport strike continued to grip the country, with no trains running and no public transport in the capital and several other cities. Lorry drivers, power workers and teachers joined the strikes in increasing numbers, and most state schools were closed.

Britain faces new power row with EU

SARAH HELM
Brussels

Britain faced new demands yesterday to hand over more powers to Brussels during the forthcoming Maastricht review negotiations, or stand accused of stalling the next phase of European evolution.

The calls followed the publication of an inquiry report by the 15 member states on how the European Union should reshape its policies and institutions in the inter-governmental conference next year. The report, by the "Reflection Group", revealed the true extent of Britain's isolation, and will set new battle lines for the summit of heads of government in Madrid in two weeks.

Playing down the prospect of new confrontation, David Davis, the Foreign Office minister on the Reflection Group, said it was now "probable" that the so-called Maastricht II conference would conclude after the next election in Britain, likely to be early in 1997. He declined to comment on hopes expressed by Britain's European partners that a more pro-European Labour government might be in power by then.

The Reflection Group report confirms that during its six months of talks, all but Britain wanted to weaken the power of individual states by increasing the use of qualified majority voting in the EU Council of Ministers. All states but Britain also wanted to strengthen the democratic legitimacy of EU institutions by giving new powers to the European Parliament.

if Europe is to operate effectively after enlargement to the east, Britain believes there is no need for more integration, insists on maintaining its right to opt out of new EU social policies and resists any new Brussels powers over foreign policy or asylum and immigration.

Expressing frustration at the British position yesterday, Carlos Westendorp, the Spanish chairman of the Reflection Group, said Britain would not be able to remain on the outside: in the end "pragmatism" would prevail. Mr Westendorp said the Maastricht II negotiations would provide a "major historical opportunity" for Europe to prepare for the next millennium, strongly signalling that Britain would not be allowed to stand in the way.

Whichever party is in power in Britain when the Maastricht II negotiations are concluded should be prepared to show "realism", Mr Westendorp said.

Just three months ago John Major expressed the view that Europe's plans for integration were slowing down and the European Union was now dancing to Britain's sluggish tune. At the time, there were signs of growing disarray within the union, with Franco and German in particular appearing undecided about federalist plans. However, Britain's clear refusal to compromise on even the more limited power-sharing proposals laid before the Reflection Group has spread new frustration among other European leaders, who now find themselves within months of the launch of Maastricht II talks with almost no common ground on how to proceed.

How a smug political élite got it all wrong

MARY DEJEVSKY
Paris

When Alain Juppé stood up in the National Assembly yesterday to defend his government against a vote of censure from the Socialists, he and his fellow Gaullists might well have asked themselves how they had got into this mess. Only six months before, all the cards had seemed stacked in their favour, giving them more room for manoeuvre than any government in France for more than a decade.

Jacques Chirac had won a convincing majority in the presidential election in May and had a seven-year term before him. The Gaullist-led coalition held three-quarters of seats in the National Assembly, and a comfortable majority in the Senate. The next parliamentary elections are not due until 1998.

Mr Juppé was not only seen as one of the best brains of his generation, but appeared so politically and temperamentally close to Mr Chirac that disagreement looked unlikely. For the first time for many years, it seemed, the French constitutional axiom "The President presides and the government governs" had a chance of working. How did it go so wrong?

First, contradictory election promises from Mr Chirac that allowed different sections of the voting public – taxpayers, the unemployed, students, big business – all to believe they would benefit at the same time.

The second failure was Mr Juppé's, deriving from his first government, appointed immediately after Mr Chirac's election. Marked by departmental squabbles, it was dissolved after five months, having squandered a honeymoon period when voters would have expected, if not fully supported, change. The country's financial position looked stronger and the jobs situation better than today, allowing a little more room for manoeuvre. By the time Mr Juppé was reappointed Prime Minister and had named a leaner, shinner, more like-minded team, public disappointment had already set in.

The constitutional peculiarities of France may also have

played a part. The huge majority for the Gaullist-led coalition in parliament reflected the voters' mood in 1993, exasperated with 12 years of François Mitterrand. This year's presidential election showed a 53-47 right-left split. The mayoral elections held a month later showed a still more even division, with a considerable bias against established power. The President can call new parliamentary elections, but Mr Chirac had no incentive to do so, because of his party's huge majority. So President, parliament and public are out of kilter.



Juppé: Winning support of MPs was not enough

Constitutional relations between the Prime Minister, the government and parliament also limit the degree to which parliament, in particular, can function as the "voice of the people" in response to the public mood. The Prime Minister is appointed by the President and is, in theory, accountable both to him and to parliament. In practice, however, parliament has hardly any real "checking" role at all.

The fact that ministers may not also be MPs means that the common interest which binds together the governing party in Britain hardly exists. Similarly, voters have no confidence that if they lobby their MPs their views will be passed on to ministers.

The separation of executive and legislature is hardly unique to France. But with presidential and parliamentary

elections not coinciding it means ministers and MPs can both be detached from the national mood in a way that would be difficult in Britain.

A third crucial factor is the separate world inhabited by the French élite, which includes ministers and MPs of most parties. Increasingly, they have been educated (at the highly selective *grandes écoles*), worked (in well-paid safe jobs in the civil service or state industry) and lived (in prestigious and subsidised accommodation) in conditions different from those of the rest of the population.

The reception for Mr Juppé's social security reforms illustrates the gap between the élite and the rest. When he presented his proposals to the National Assembly three weeks ago, he had prepared the ground impeccably. Potential dissidents on the right were heard and given small concessions, so were difficult lobby groups, and Socialist leaders, including the leader of the biggest, Socialist-dominated trade union, the CFDT.

Within this small group, the proposals were, if not welcomed, accepted as inevitable. So was Mr Juppé's decision to rush the main proposals through parliament by "edict", rather than after a series of parliamentary debates. Mr Juppé sat back, watched the franc rise and believed his troubles were over.

But as news of the reforms filtered through to the rest of the population (Mr Juppé's speech in parliament was not televised), the mood turned hostile and stubborn. No one – not the President, not Mr Juppé, not even the social affairs minister – went on television to tell people what the measures entailed; rumours multiplied. The decision to pass the measures by edict looked like additional defiance of the French public.

Finally, last weekend the Socialists in parliament, like the major trade union leaders a few days before, understood that public anger was forcing their hand. They tabled a censure motion. It was a late and hopeless gesture, which served to illustrate why real opposition in France is on the streets.

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international

Bosnia settlement: In snub to Americans, French announce Balkan agreement brokered in Ohio will be called Elysée Treaty

Paris tries to steal US peace laurels

SARAH HELM
Brussels

Stepping up its drive to snatch the role of chief peace-maker in Bosnia, France yesterday announced that the Dayton accords would be transformed into the Elysée Peace Treaty when the agreement is formally signed in Paris next week.

At a meeting of Nato's foreign and defence ministers in Brussels, France also signalled that it intends to claim a new role in the "renewal" of Nato. Hervé de Charette, the French Foreign Minister, confirmed France is to rejoin Nato's military and defence planning bodies, which it left in 1966, putting Paris back at the heart of the alliance's decision-making.

The French diplomatic drive dominated the Brussels meet-

ing yesterday the purpose of which was to finalise plans for the deployment of the 60,000-strong Implementation Force in Bosnia. France's partners welcomed Paris's decision to resume its military connections with Nato, although scepticism was voiced about the claims that France could suddenly breathe life into the alliance.

US officials were also muted in their response to the France's unilateral announcement that the Dayton accords are to be transformed into the Elysée Treaty. British officials said there had been no consultation on the decision.

Britain will also try to share some of the Dayton limelight when it holds the London implementation conference this weekend, where plans for the rebuilding of the countries of the

former Yugoslavia will be drawn up.

The French diplomatic offensive brings to the surface the under-current of transatlantic rivalry over who can lay claim to the success of the Bosnian peace agreement.

Paris and London were irritated at the way the US sidelined the Europeans during the negotiations and laid down the law over the Nato peace implementation operation. The Americans have privately dismissed European concerns, arguing that their failed efforts to broker a peace have been characterised by confusion.

Expanding on what he claimed was France's central role in the peace-making Charles Millon, the French Defence Minister, yesterday made the remarkable claim that this

year's Bosnia peace negotiations had moved "from Paris to Paris", referring, apparently to an earlier inconclusive Paris peace conference, which Mr Millon suggested had led to the deal which is to be signed next week. Neither Mr de Charette or Mr Millon made any reference to the US role, referring only to the success of the "international community".

The rationale behind France's rapprochement with Nato appears to be an acknowledgement that full co-ordination of the Bosnia operation cannot come about if French generals are left out of the key planning bodies. "France is ready to work to the renewal of Nato," Mr Millon said.

"France will assure the evolution of Nato so it can adapt to the conditions of our time."



Guarded welcome: A US officer arriving in Tuzla in a UN armoured vehicle

Photograph: Wade Goddard/Reuters

Media barrage greets first GIs to reach Tuzla

EMMA DALY
Tuzla

The first US troops dispatched to implement the Dayton peace plan arrived yesterday in Tuzla, a dreary industrial town in northern Bosnia, led by Brigadier-General Stan Cherrie, deputy commander of the 1st Armoured Division. A phalanx of television cameras staked out the main gate of Tuzla's vast military air base to catch the moment of arrival.

The 10 officers in the divisional reconnaissance team arrived in UN armoured troop carriers, but the tell-tale camouflaged helmets among the peace-keepers' blue ones alerted the waiting pack.

"First impressions?" one reporter asked. "It's cold," replied the American. "Not miserable, just cold." He will change his mind soon enough, and anyway, yesterday was warm by Tuzla's standards.

The city, a former industrial power-house whose welcome sign stands before the back-drop of an enormous power station belching smoke from every orifice, has few material benefits. The city is sinking, victim of the salt mining it is named for - "tuz" is Turkish for "salt". Many old buildings have collapsed. The effect is like that of an earthquake, according to the city council's brochure.

Tuzla - where reason prevails" does, however, rejoice in its multi-ethnic and tolerant history. It was the only Bosnian city not to vote on ethnic lines, so the Social Democratic Party is in control, not the Muslim

SDA that runs the rest of government-held Bosnia, in spite of the city's Muslim majority.

There is, therefore, political rivalry between Tuzla and Sarajevo. The city wants to extend its independence after the war, and is seeking funds to convert the air base, one of the largest military fields in former Yugoslavia, into a commercial airport. For the moment, the base is under UN control, but it will be taken over by Nato next week; in the summer it housed 30,000 refugees from Srebrenica, camped on the runway.

The alliance wants it to operate as an air base, so the first headache for US planners has been to find suitable homes for the 4,000 to 5,000 troops attached to the Tuzla headquarters. The bulk of the force will be based in smaller groups closer to the confrontation line, which will require an enormous engineering effort, building roads, bridges, bases and observation posts.

Yesterday the American officers, hotly pursued by photographers, were busy with tape measures, checking the dimensions of a bridge on the road towards a confrontation line, and examining a field that might serve as a helicopter landing site.

Communications and logistics experts, plus staff officers, are also working to set up bases in Sarajevo, which will be the site of the overall Nato headquarters. The UN is expected to transfer its authority to Nato, led by a British commander, in mid-December, after which the combat troops will arrive.

RAF mission gives boost to charities

JOHN MCKIE

The Independent's Children of War Appeal had a boost yesterday with the news that the RAF will fly crucial medical equipment to seriously ill children in Bosnia.

The equipment - an infant and child's ventilator, two special infusion pumps and a monitoring VDU system - was donated respectively by Northwick Park Hospital, the IVAC medical firm, and the computer company Hewlett Packard. The project, which was organised by the Child Advocacy International charity, will bring equipment basic to every British intensive-care unit to the war-torn country.

The head of the charity, Professor David Southall, who runs an intensive-care unit for children at North Staffordshire Hospital, Stoke, said: "There's no doubt children's lives will be saved by this. This equipment would be found by each bed in



every intensive-care unit in the UK. In Bosnia, there's no real intensive-care unit for children. If anything starts to go wrong, children don't survive.

Professor Southall added that every week in Bosnia a baby is born with complicated heart disease, and the new equipment would enable their heartbeats to be monitored. According to the charity's figures, one in a thousand children in Bosnia has a serious illness which cannot be treated without this level of care. Equipment such as the VDU system - which monitors heart rate, oxygen, temperatures and blood rates - will be vital in saving lives.

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Arabian hit squads
Cairo's

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Egyptian hit-squads: Islamist 'terrorists' strike back as long arm of Mubarak's vengeance reaches out to London

Cairo's dirty war spills across Europe

ROBERT FISK
Cairo

Alaa al-Din Nazmi drove into the underground car-park of his luxury Geneva apartment at about 9pm on 13 November. Married with a four-month-old daughter, the commercial counsellor to the Egyptian embassy should have had no reason to fear assassination. Officials from the UN's European headquarters also lived in the apartment block and - officially, at least - Nazmi spent much of his time negotiating the future of Egypt's basket-case economy with members of the World Trade Organisation.

But no sooner had he parked his car and begun walking across the garage to take the lift to his seventh-floor flat than a gunman - or gunmen - opened fire. Nazmi was hit by six bullets and died instantly, although his body was not discovered for another two hours.

In Cairo, however, political sources suggested that Nazmi was working under diplomatic cover, and that his real job was to track down members of Egyptian Islamist armed groups in Europe who have sworn to overthrow President Hosni Mubarak's regime. Nazmi's murderers said as much two days later. Describing themselves as the *Gemaa al Adala al Islamiya* - the "International Justice Group" - they claimed that his real job was to hunt Muslim "activists" on behalf of the Egyptian government.

The Egyptian authorities insist Nazmi was no more than a diplomat. But his murder came less than two months after Talaat Qassem, the co-founder of Egypt's *Gemaa Islamiya* - the "Islamic Group" - largely responsible for the anti-Mubarak insurrection that has cost almost 900 lives in Egypt over the past three years - disappeared on a visit to the Croatian capital of Zagreb. Mr Qassem held refugee status in Denmark and his family said he was visiting former Yugoslavia to research a book. But other sources claimed he was on the way to visit Islamist fighters in Bosnia.

Whatever the purpose of his trip, the Croatian authorities said they arrested the 38-year-old Egyptian on 12 September, fined him for violating residence laws and expelled him from the country six days later.



Bomb aftermath: A crater outside the Egyptian embassy in Islamabad. Some of the 18 dead may have been secret agents

Photograph: AP

from the country six days later.

Muslim activists sympathetic to the *Gemaa*, however, told a different story. They said Mr Qassem was seized by a group of American intelligence officers, interrogated and later sent to Egypt via the Croatian port of Rijeka, and is now being held in the Al-Mansoura Egyptian intelligence headquarters. Both the United States and the Croatians flatly denied the story. But two weeks later, a massive car bomb blew up in Rijeka, killing a Croatian policeman. It followed a threat from an organisation calling itself "Vanguards of Conquest" which had warned the Croats not to send Mr Qassem back to Egypt.

By mid-November, therefore, the Egyptian regime was at war with its enemies overseas. President Mubarak, outraged at the continuation of the armed Muslim insurrection in Upper

Egypt, decided to send large numbers of his own intelligence officers abroad to hunt down what he called the "Arab

Afghans", the Arab volunteers who had fought against the Soviet Union with CIA backing in Afghanistan but once the war was over had turned against the regimes of Egypt and Algeria in the hope of creating Islamic republics.

Up to 100 Egyptian state security police were dispatched to London to set up a base for "anti-terrorist" operations in Europe. Around 40 of the men were stated by a reliable military source in Cairo to be armed; all of them were said to be tasked to eliminate the "terrorists" who had declared war on Egypt. Mr Mubarak also sanctioned the dispatch of another 100 men to Pakistan to pursue Egyptian militants in Baluchistan and other

areas bordering Afghanistan.

One Cairo source says that Hassan al-Alfi, the Egyptian Interior Minister, was behind the entire project, having told the President during the summer that if three named "Arab Afghans" were liquidated, the "terrorist war" against Egypt would be over. The three men were named as Mr Qassem, an activist called Iman al-Zawahri, whom the Egyptians believed to be living in Switzerland, and Mohamed el-Islambouly, reported to be in Pakistan, the brother of Lieutenant Khaled el-Islambouly, the army officer who murdered President Anwar Sadat in 1981.

By late September, Mr Qassem had disappeared in Croatia. The Swiss denied all knowledge of Mr Zawahri but the Egyptian government's first diplomat casualty had been shot down in Switzerland in

mid-November. Then, on 19

November, a suicide bomber attacked the Egyptian embassy in the Pakistani capital of Islamabad, killing 18 men, including five diplomats. Once again, sources in Cairo said that several of the dead embassy officials were working under cover as diplomats to help the Pakistani authorities track down members of the *Gemaa* and other anti-government groups, especially Mohamed el-Islambouly; indeed, the same sources claimed that these same men had already secured the extradition of nine wanted Egyptian militants to Cairo. Mr Mubarak was on the point of sending the next batch of 100 intelligence officers to Islamabad on a parallel operation to the one he had sanctioned for London when the Islamabad bomb went off. The operation was cancelled at 24 hours' notice.

Two days after the bombing,

however, the *Adala al-Islamiya* group - which had admitted the murder of Alaa al-Din Nazmi in Geneva - claimed responsibility for the Islamabad slaughter, and added a ferocious new warning. "There are other death sentences that have been issued against other [diplomats] and these sentences will be implemented even if they hang from the curtains of the Kabaa (the holy black stone shrine in Mecca), the group said in a faxed acknowledgement of responsibility. "There is no punishment for you other than cutting your bodies into shreds. You are more criminal than the Zionists."

The claim also demanded the freeing of Sheikh Omar Abdul Rahman, one of Mr Mubarak's fiercest enemies among Islamist prelates, currently jailed in the United States, and the release

of Talaat Qassem from his suspended prison in Egypt.

Egypt's tit-for-tat war with its enemies abroad now seems set to produce further bloodshed. And just as Egypt's ruthless intelligence services are hunting for the regime's enemies abroad, President Mubarak has instituted an ever more draconian repression at home.

Quite apart from the sentencing of 54 non-violent members of the Muslim Brotherhood before last week's parliamentary elections - in which several of the convicted men were candidates - and the death of 26 Islamists in Egyptian prisons since January, it has now emerged that his intelligence services took action against Cairo University students who protested at his decision to attend the Jerusalem funeral of Yitzhak Rabin on 5 November.

Sources close to the Egyptian security forces say that at least 50 students, most of whom were demonstrating against the regime rather than the Jerusalem visit, were arrested by plainclothes policemen posing as university officials. After they had been forced to give their addresses, police raided their homes and took their entire families, including women with babies, to the Central Security Camp on the Cairo-Alexandria road, where many were kept without food and water for two days. Some policemen brought bread and water to the elderly - but only for pay.

Even less publicised were the bloody raids by security force personnel on two villages, Maghaga in Minya province and another hamlet near the Fayoum oasis, just a month ago.

About 1,500 police were reported to have stormed Maghaga, apparently looking for Islamic "terrorists". They killed 13 men, including, they said, a local Muslim militant leader. In Fayoum, seven people were killed, including the local head of the *Gemaa Islamiya*. "This was not just a military operation," a source familiar with the raids said in Cairo this week. "The security forces were asked to be policemen, judges and executioners."

Is that, European governments may now ask, what the Egyptian government has ordered its intelligence men abroad to be?

IN BRIEF

Rabin murder charges filed

Jerusalem — Israeli prosecutors filed a charge of premeditated murder against Yigal Amir, the confessed assassin of the prime minister Yitzhak Rabin. Two alleged accomplices - his brother Hagai and a friend, Dror Adam - were charged with conspiracy and illegal weapons possession. *Reuters*

Kindergarten deaths

Vladikavkaz — A man demanding a ransom seized a kindergarten in southern Russia, but detonated two grenades before his deadline expired, killing three children and wounding several other people, including himself. *AP*

Swede pulls out

Stockholm — After 24 hours of speculation, the Swedish Finance Minister, Goran Persson, who had been tipped to succeed the Prime Minister, Ingvar Carlsson, next March, said he would not run for the post under any circumstances. *Reuters*

Bomb arrests

Paris — French police staged dawn raids in Paris, Lyons, Toulouse and Tours, detaining 19 people they suspect of having links to Muslim extremist networks accused of a wave of bombings since July. *Reuters*

PM slightly better

Athens — The ailing Greek Prime Minister, Andreas Papandreu, showed a slight improvement yesterday, according to his doctors, although he remains on life-support systems for his lungs and kidney systems. *Reuters*

Dam kills three

Geneva — A routine release of water from a hydro-electric dam swept away six young children and their teacher on a nature outing. The teacher and two of the children were drowned. *AP*

Journalist shot

Paris — Khadija Dahmani, 28, of the Arab-language mass circulation weekly *El-Houarak*, was shot dead at her home near Algiers. She was the second journalist killed in the Algerian capital in the past four days. *Reuters*

Dead drunk

Moscow — More than 160 people have frozen to death in Moscow in the past month, in temperatures as low as -19C. The city's health department said all were drunk. *AP*

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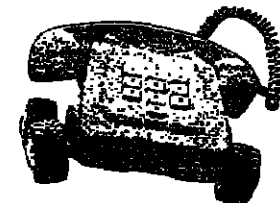
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international

South Korea slush-fund scandal hits president

RICHARD LLOYD PARRY
Tokyo

The political uproar in South Korea opened a rift in the ruling party yesterday after the former president, Roh Tae Woo, was formally indicted for corruption, along with leaders of the country's biggest companies.

Twenty days after his arrest, prosecutors charged Mr Roh with accepting bribes worth \$355m (£232m) during his five-year term, which ended in 1993. The scale of the alleged corruption is staggering. Thirty-five businessmen are said by the prosecutors to have paid the former president individual sums of up to \$32m for government contracts. These he held in a secret slush fund, scattered through bank accounts held in false names, which he allegedly used to give political favours.

Mr Roh has admitted to co-ordinating \$650m, which he claims was amassed through legitimate political donations. Investigators say he has refused to answer many of their questions and may be hiding far larger sums.

Several Roh aides were also charged, along with seven businessmen accused of giving the bribes, including the chairman of the Samsung, Daewoo and Dong Ah conglomerates. Only Mr Roh was held in custody, however: the markets took this as a sign that the businessmen would be treated leniently, and stock prices rose slightly.

But the arrests provoked stirrings of discontent with the current President, Kim Young Sam, as the chairman of his ruling Democratic Liberal Party (DLP) tendered his resignation - the first clear sign of Mr Kim's political security being endangered by the investigations.

The DLP chairman, Kim Yoon Hwan, was a close aide of both Mr Roh and his predecessor, Chun Doo Hwan, who was arrested on Sunday on separate charges. The party chairman withdrew his resignation after a meeting with the President, but the rumour in Seoul was that several members of his faction would soon resign. That would leave President Kim in a precarious position in the run-up to parliamentary elections next spring. The likeliest outcome seems to be a drastic realignment of Korean politics, with the opposition filling the gap left by the defectors.

But it is a risky strategy for the President, who is thought by many to have let events run out of control, goaded by allegations that he too benefited from Mr Roh's slush fund. What began a month ago as a corruption scandal has become an attack on an entire generation of South Korean leaders.

With the filing of yesterday's charges, attention will now focus on the much more serious treason case facing Chun Doo Hwan. Three days ago he was arrested for questioning about his leadership of a military coup in 1979. As generals, Mr Chun and Mr Roh are widely believed to have ordered the massacre of more than 200 pro-democracy demonstrators in the city of Kwangju in 1980, still a profound wound in the divided country.

Mr Roh is also being questioned about the massacre, and yesterday five other retired generals, lesser participants in the coup, were banned from travelling overseas. In a country which achieved democracy only two years ago, after 32 years of military rule, these are bold and disquieting moves.



Displaced: A Tamil refugee bringing her sick child to a clinic at Vavuniya, in north-central Sri Lanka

Photograph: Anuruddha Lokuhapuar/Reuters

Tigers take to the jungle as Jaffna falls

TIM MCGIRK
New Delhi

It took the Sri Lankan army 50 days to slog nine miles through swamps and rice paddies, dodging snipers and mines. The government lost over 450 soldiers, and a third of its air force was destroyed. But in the end, the Sri Lankan forces conquered the rebel citadel of Jaffna.

For the first time in five years, the flag of Sri Lanka, a snarling golden lion, was hoisted over a 400-year old Dutch fort. Until yesterday, Jaffna had been the centre of a mini-state set up in northern Sri Lanka by the Tamil Tiger rebels. The autocratic rebels ran their own schools, judged "traitors" in their courts, raised war taxes and drummed up an army of teenagers. For many Tamil militants, the loss of Jaffna town was a devastating blow to their

dreams of Eelam, an independent homeland.

While the flag was unfurled in Jaffna, people elsewhere in Sri Lanka celebrated this turning point in the 12-year ethnic war between the Sinhalese and the Tamil minority by shooting off fireworks in the streets. The government feared that Sinhalese mobs, drunk on cheap rum and the triumph over the Tigers, might attack Tamil communities in the capital, Colombo, and elsewhere on the island. But this did not happen. Martial music played on Sri Lankan radio for most of the day.

"This is not the end of the war. Very soon, we will totally defeat and annihilate the separatist terrorists," said the deputy defence minister, Anuruddha Ratwatte.

He and his generals had flown to the Jaffna ceremony at considerable risk. Tigers have

downed at least four military planes with missiles and anti-aircraft guns, in jungle areas and over water which had supposedly been cleared by the army.

The minister was only partly right. Victory in Jaffna, indeed, does not signal the end to this war which has cost over 38,000 lives: vanquishing the Tigers may prove impossible militarily. Even as Sri Lankans rejoiced over the capture of Jaffna yesterday, a Tiger suicide killer drove a lorry piled with explosives into a police camp at Amparai, hundreds of miles away from the Jaffna battle zone. The police got off lightly, only one man being injured.

Without Jaffna, the Tigers are crippled. Thousands of fighters were wounded in the defence of the town and they have had to be carted to underground hospitals hidden deep in the malarial jungle with no electricity and

little medicine. But the rebels still control large swathes of the Jaffna peninsula and operate freely in the jungles of north and east Sri Lanka. Knowing that the military massed over 25,000 troops for the assault on Jaffna, the Tigers recently switched their attacks to more exposed targets in the east. Carpeted in dense jungle, the eastern provinces are ideal for guerrilla war.

The Tigers have another weapon: the Tamil civilians they herded out of Jaffna. Film clips released by the military on the conquest of Jaffna yesterday showed empty, blasted buildings with only a few hundred Tamils, old and sick, huddled in a school. The rest of the city had been forced by the Tigers to clear out. Over 400,000 Tamils are now in jungle refugee camps, and the Tigers refuse to let them return to Jaffna, as if

to say to the government: you may have won the city, but you've lost the Tamil people.

Much as the Tamils would like to go back to their homes, farms and schools, now under the government control, few will dare to risk being branded by the Tigers as traitors.

Sri Lanka's President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, is trying to coax the Tigers back into peace negotiations. Generous in victory, she has repeated her offer to give the Tamils greater autonomy in the north and east, with the right to administer their own schools, land and police force.

Her next task is to have this package approved by parliament, which may be tricky, with Sinhalese nationalists opposed to it. And the Tigers' chief, Velupillai Prabhakaran, says he will not negotiate "at the barrel of a gun".

Rapper witness changes his tune

Los Angeles (AP) — A prosecution witness in the murder trial of the rapper Snoop Doggy Dogg changed his story and said he could not have seen the crime clearly because he was high on marijuana and was not wearing his glasses.

The rapper (real name Calvin Broadus) and his bodyguard, McKinley Lee, are charged with the murder of Philip Woldemariam in 1993. Police sources claim Woldemariam, 20, and Mr Broadus, 24, had connections with different street gangs. The victim, a member of the By Yerself Hustlers, apparently resented Mr Broadus, listed as a member of the Long Beach Insane Crips, for moving into his neighbourhood during the recording of his hit record, *Doggystyle*. The defence says the shooting was done in self-defence.

Jose Luis Murillo told the court on Monday that he had been standing with his cousin, Cesar Serrano, who gave evidence last week, when Mr Broadus and Mr Lee drove by several times and then stopped at a park. Prosecutors said that supported their claim that the pair were looking for a fight.

Bobby Grace, for the prosecution, reminded Mr Murillo he had told police he saw a flash of light coming from the Jeep driven by the rapper as the gun went off.

"Did you actually see a flash?" Mr Grace asked Mr Murillo.

"No," Mr Murillo responded. When asked why he gave contradictory information to police, Mr Murillo said: "It was all the excitement," adding he had merely repeated to police what Mr Serrano had told him he had seen.

Deputy District Attorney Ed Nison said he believes the witness may have changed his story because he feared reprisals from the rapper. "Every gang case I have put on, someone will get up and say, 'I lied to the police'," Mr Nison said. "It's very typical of the situation."

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هكذا من الأصل

Getting out of my skull in the den of the ju-ju man



Fangs a lot: The witchdoctor Alphonse shows his son a crocodile head that 'catches thieves' Photograph: David Orr

The other day I drank firewater from a human skull and made a wish. After an hour with the witchdoctor it seemed like a reasonable thing to do.

Before drinking, I repeated an incantation intoned by my host: "I swear I have drunk with Death. My death will not come from the hand of a human being. My death will come from the good God who put me on to this earth."

I drained the schnapps (£2.50 a bottle from the witchdoctor's wife) as he waived his ju-ju stick above my head. The drink produced a curious tingling sensation in my lips but no ill-effects. I was assured it would protect me from evil.

Alphonse, the fetishist to whose suburban Lagos home I'd been invited, had knocked back a skull-full a little earlier. I sat with my friend, Rasaki, in the gloom of a low-ceilinged shack, listening to the witchdoctor explaining his art. Inside his den, the hot afternoon air was heavy with the smell of incense.

"People come to me for all sorts of reasons", he explained as he crouched on the floor, half a dozen necklaces and charms dangling against his bare chest: "Sometimes they're looking for jobs, other times they're sick or having nightmares."

"If people dream of cats", said Alphonse, pointing to a

LAGOS DAYS

white cat on the bench beside me. "That is a very bad sign. If the cats attack you in your dream then you are seriously sick and need treatment."

"Sometimes men bring their wives if they can't become pregnant", he continued. "It could be that evil people are stopping her from conceiving. I can lift the curse."

At this point Alphonse went into a long ramble about the spirits of the sea. I presumed he was talking metaphorically, but in fact he takes the husband and barren wife to the beach, where an offering of fruit or meat is made to the spirit of the sea.

"If someone is about to die", he says, pointing at a disgusting bowl of gunk on an altar. "I anoint him with this potion. It's a secret medicine made with the heads of a culture, a stork and a crow. It also contains sand and 41 different kinds of herbs."

Alphonse Hounkpe comes from a long line of fetishists in neighbouring Benin. Once known as the Slave Coast and more recently as Dahomey, it is the birthplace of voodoo. He moved to Lagos 16 years ago with his wife and children. His younger son, Valentin, sits on the bench beside me. At one

point he does a little sprinkling routine with firewater, though he's not old enough to imbibe.

"If someone has been robbed", explains Alphonse, brandishing a crocodile head with a large bone in its teeth, "this will catch the culprit."

The bone, it transpires, is a human femur. I don't ask where Alphonse got it. His den is littered with what look like human remains. Congealed blood covers the altar and ju-ju. Rasaki later tells me Alphonse uses human-body parts for his magic, which he buys at a 'special place' in a local market.

"Now, if someone has done you harm", continues Alphonse, "I use this African gun. It's made of a human thigh bone with bottles containing ju-ju soil attached to it. I put the name of the bad person in the bone. Even if he is very far away in Europe he will get a terrible pain in his side."

Alphonse has ju-ju for a huge array of ills and inconveniences. Should you be charged with murder, Alphonse will, for a small fee, take up his duck and lizard heads, which have been bound in pieces of cloth from dead people. His spell will ensure the charge is dropped.

The den is an Aladdin's cave of trinkets. Dolls, pictures, feathers, horse tails, animal skulls, bottles, beads and statues cover every surface. In the corner is a child's coffin, which squeaks when the lid is opened. I try to see if Alphonse has a squeaky toy in his hand but it's hard to tell.

"I'm not a Christian", says Alphonse. "I don't follow any particular religion. I believe in ju-ju and in nature."

Before I leave, Alphonse gives me a magic parrot feather. He has a cage full of parrots outside, along with some repulsive-looking rodents. Next time I come to Lagos, he says, I should bring a ring. This he will feed to a chameleon which he will lock up in the parrot's cage. When the chameleon dies, he will be opened up and the ring, by now bearing magic properties, will be extracted and put on my finger.

On the way home, Rasaki, a Muslim, says most Nigerians take ju-ju seriously. Soldiers, policemen and politicians seek the fetishists' help. Rasaki believes God's power is best but that men like Alphonse are powerful and it's best not to upset them. Needless to say, I'm keeping my parrot feather charm in a safe place.

DAVID ORR

Ex-president of Mexico attempts to clear name

PHIL DAVISON
Latin America Correspondent

For the first time since he fled Mexico in disgrace nine months ago, the former Mexican president, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, is fighting back. He claims he is the victim of a power struggle between hard-line "dinosaurs" and long-standing Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and its younger, US-educated political and economic reformers.

Mr Salinas, who fled in March after his brother Raul was arrested in connection with murder and he himself was blamed for Mexico's financial crisis, faxed a long statement to Mexican media on Monday night. Said to have been sent from

as the peso crashed three weeks later, and Mr Zedillo blamed him for deliberately veiling the nation's financial problems.

Then, in February, Raul Salinas was held on suspicion of masterminding the assassination of Jose Francisco Ruiz Massieu, the PRI's secretary-general and former long-time ally of his sister, Adriana Salinas. She, too, is currently under investigation over an alleged banking fraud.

In March, Carlos Salinas fled first to New York, then to Montreal and now reportedly to the protection of his old friend, Fidel Castro.

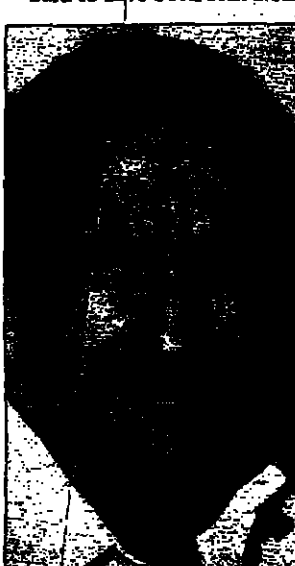
His flight led many to suspect him of involvement in an earlier assassination, that of the PRI's original presidential candidate, Luis Donaldo Colosio in Tijuana in March 1994. Others believed PRI hardliners were behind the killing, fearing Colosio would expand Mr Salinas's political and free-market economic openings and cut into their traditional power base and wealth.

In his statement, Mr Salinas came close to accusing Mr Echeverria, president from 1970-76 of involvement in the Colosio murder. "A few hours after the painful death of my dear friend Luis Donaldo Colosio, former president Luis Echeverria showed up unannounced at my office with great urgency to propose his candidacy. Obviously, it was not Dr Ernesto Zedillo," he wrote.

"Nothing that has happened in Mexico this year is unconnected to a tremendous struggle for power. What has been at stake here is what sort of nation will prevail. I am ready to make myself available to any inquiry."

The former president did not comment on the murder charge against his brother, but on the charges that Raul Salinas built up a fortune while working for a government food distribution agency with a salary of around £50,000 a year. He wrote: "My brother Raul's deception is unacceptable. From the beginning of my administration, I asked him to abstain from participating in business deals. I never knew of such activities."

Raul Salinas's wife, Paulina, was arrested in Switzerland last month as she tried to withdraw cash from a \$94m bank account believed to have been set up by Raul Salinas using an alias. The Swiss had apparently been tipped off by the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), who believe the account contained laundered money from drug dealing. Mexican authorities say they have traced 48 bank accounts to Raul Salinas and 44 properties. Scotland Yard is said to be helping the Mexican authorities "with inquiries into a murder and money-laundering," apparently after a \$20m bank account was discovered in London under an alias allegedly used by Raul Salinas.



Carlos Salinas: Claims to be victim of power tussle

Cuba, where he was last seen, it accused another former president, Luis Echeverria, of a campaign to discredit him and his policies of political and economic opening. Even though Mr Salinas was clearly trying to deflect criticism, his remarks struck a chord among many Mexicans who increasingly see the entire PRI-controlled system as corrupt.

Mr Salinas denied responsibility for the economic crisis and said he had been unaware of any criminal activities by his brother. He attributed the scandal surrounding his family to a "tremendous struggle for power in Mexico" and specifically to a "political offensive" by Mr Echeverria.

Locals are billing it the Battle of the Old Dinosaurs versus the Baby Dinosaurs - the PRI's old guard against its younger technocrats, symbolised by Mr Salinas and his successor, President Ernesto Zedillo. Mr Zedillo, close to Mr Salinas throughout his career, has made no comment on his predecessor's statement.

Mr Salinas was praised at home and abroad when he handed over the presidential sash to Mr Zedillo on 1 December last year and was on the verge of the coveted appointment as head of the new World Trade Organisation. His reputation slumped

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THE CONVICTION OF KEN SARO-WIWA

On 8th November, 1995, the Provisional Ruling Council (PRC) upheld the death sentences passed on Mr. Ken Saro-Wiwa, and eight others on 30th and 31st October, 1995, by the Ogoni Civil Disturbances Tribunal headed by Justice Ibrahim Auta, a renowned Judge of the Federal Court of Appeal, for the gruesome murder of four prominent Ogoni sons, on 21st May, 1994. Six other accused persons were freed, including Ledum Mitee, the Vice-President of MOSOP. Since the sentences were passed there have been both local and international reactions to the verdict. While some of the reactions have been pleas for clemency, others have been full of vitriolic fulminations, designed to trivialise a very serious murder charge which claimed the precious lives of four prominent Ogoni sons, in a most barbaric, inhuman and despicable manner.

2. It is true that Ken Saro-Wiwa is a foremost writer of international repute, who during the Nigerian civil war served as one of the youngest Commissioners in the Executive Council of Navy Commander Alfred Diete Spiff, the then Governor of Rivers State. It is also true that the four prominent Ogoni sons who were murdered on 21st May, 1994, had equally enviable credentials or pedigree. Mr. Albert Bayey was a one-time Permanent Secretary, State Commissioner and later, Secretary to the Rivers State Government; Chief E. N. Kobani was a former State Commissioner, former Deputy President of MOSOP, and former National Publicity Secretary of the defunct Social Democratic Party (SDP); Chief Samuel Orage was a one-time State Commissioner and Chief T. B. Orage was Secretary to the Gokana Council of Chiefs.

3. What is more? These four prominent sons of Ogoniland were among the founders of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), which was formed in 1990 and originally conceived as a pressure group that would use non-violent methods to protect the Ogoni people from the environmental degradation caused by oil exploitation and exploration in their areas. In fact, its first President, Mr. Garrick Leton, a former Federal Commissioner escaped being killed because he was not present at the scene of the barbaric murder. Otherwise, nearly all the foundation members would have been completely wiped out by a group of terrorists and bandits under the umbrella of the National Youth Council of Ogoni People (NYCOP) formed by Saro-Wiwa as the Youth Wing of MOSOP.

4. Ken Saro-Wiwa, who is now being widely acclaimed as the leader of MOSOP was not among its original founders. It was after its formation that he requested to be made its spokesman/ambassador in charge of Public Affairs to enable him to deal with the Press, given his wide contacts with the local and international media. Together, they produced the Ogoni bill of rights. But Ken Saro-Wiwa had his own agenda, unknown to the foundation members. In 1993, he mooted the idea of forming a Youth Wing within the movement but this was widely opposed by other members. Despite their opposition, he unilaterally formed the Youth Wing, which he called the National Youth Council of Ogoni People, promising its impressionable young members a lot of el dorado, such as huge bank accounts, palatial mansions and luxurious cars. The Youth Wing not only became militant in their approach to issues, they became a law unto themselves and unleashed a reign of terror as well as campaigns of calumny, blackmail, vilification and destruction on the whole of Ogoniland, mounting over 150 road blocks.

5. Despite admonitions from the elders, which included those murdered in cold blood, that the Youth Wing which had illegally constituted itself into a vigilante group and a private Army of Ken Saro-Wiwa, be much more restrained and follow the movement's original methods of dialogue which the MOSOP had used effectively in the past, they continued their reign of terror with the promptings of Ken Saro-Wiwa, their Commander-in-Chief. When it became clear that the group had not only become uncontrollable but owed their loyalty only to Ken Saro-Wiwa, the original founders parted ways with him, and from then on he declared war on them and hijacked the leadership of MOSOP. It was this war that culminated in the gruesome murder of four prominent Ogoni sons during a meeting in the palace of their revered king. The only sins of the Great Four was that they disagreed with Ken Saro-Wiwa over the tactics, and were later to pay dearly with their own lives. The build up to their tragic end was written, sealed and delivered by Ken Saro-Wiwa.

6. For instance, inflammatory exchanges between Ken and the big four also showed clearly that deep-seated animosity existed amongst them. For instance, on 27th November, 1993, Chief Edward Kobani, who was one of those murdered, in a letter addressed to the Rt. Rev. Bishop J. B. Poromon of the Methodist Church wrote en quote: "Ken Saro-Wiwa has a formidable army of trained thugs and hoodlums who are terrorising the whole of Ogoniland, destroying the lives and property of those he does not like in the attempt to emerge as the one and only Ogoni leader". Ken Saro-Wiwa replied in a letter dated 15th December, 1993 en quote: "I have noted how far your stock has fallen in the Ogoni Market. When will you accept responsibility for your failure. I cannot stop you from envying my achievements. I invite you to copy my ways and you will find that which you desire the most, Ken Saro-Wiwa image. Good advice and it's free". Such deep feelings of hatred were manifested in other correspondences between Ken Saro-Wiwa and other members killed on 21st May, 1994.

7. It was, therefore, not surprising when Justice Auta stated while sentencing Ken Saro-Wiwa to death that he (Saro-Wiwa) did not only counsel others to kill, he also prepared the grounds for the killing and organised NYCOP and some elements in MOSOP to carry out the dastardly murder of four prominent Ogoni sons. He added that his utterances, activities and actions before the killings were well rehearsed actions to carry out the killings for which he and his accomplices were, consequently, convicted.

8. There are so many truths being twisted by some misguided elements to discredit the Federal Government. First, before the brutal, unconscionable and condemnable murder of the four prominent Ogoni citizens, no single Ogoni man was being held for the non-violent expression of his views. To the contrary, the Federal Government in keeping with its policy of Freedom of Speech and association, allowed Saro-Wiwa and MOSOP to thrive as a pressure group which expressed its views freely from time to time. The views were sometimes considered on their own merit and taken into account by the Federal Government in Oil Policy formulations. Second, Ken Saro-Wiwa and others being tried were allowed access to the Counsels of their choice. There was delay after those Counsel withdrew. In accordance with the law, Government lawyers were picked to defend the accused persons.

9. Third, they were never tried by either a special military tribunal nor a court-martial as was being banded about. They were tried by a Special Tribunal recognised in law and headed by a renowned Judge of the Federal Court of Appeal. In fact, it is a cardinal legal principle that laws should be interpreted as they are and not as they should be to meet selfish interests. Special Tribunals are recognised under the Nigerian Judicial system and function like normal courts. Their principal purpose is to speed up the dispensation of justice.

10. Ken Saro-Wiwa's life is no more precious than the lives of the four prominent Ogoni citizens murdered in cold blood simply because they disagreed with Ken Saro-Wiwa over the tactics of achieving their goals. The families of the four slain Ogonis expect justice, albeit for the latter's selfish ends. Ken Saro-Wiwa was not sentenced to death because of his quest for a fair deal for his people or for environmental matters, he was sentenced to death for the cruel murder of four prominent Ogoni sons. Those who were murdered on 21st May, 1994 are no lesser beings than Ken Saro-Wiwa. He produced the monster that eventually consumed him.

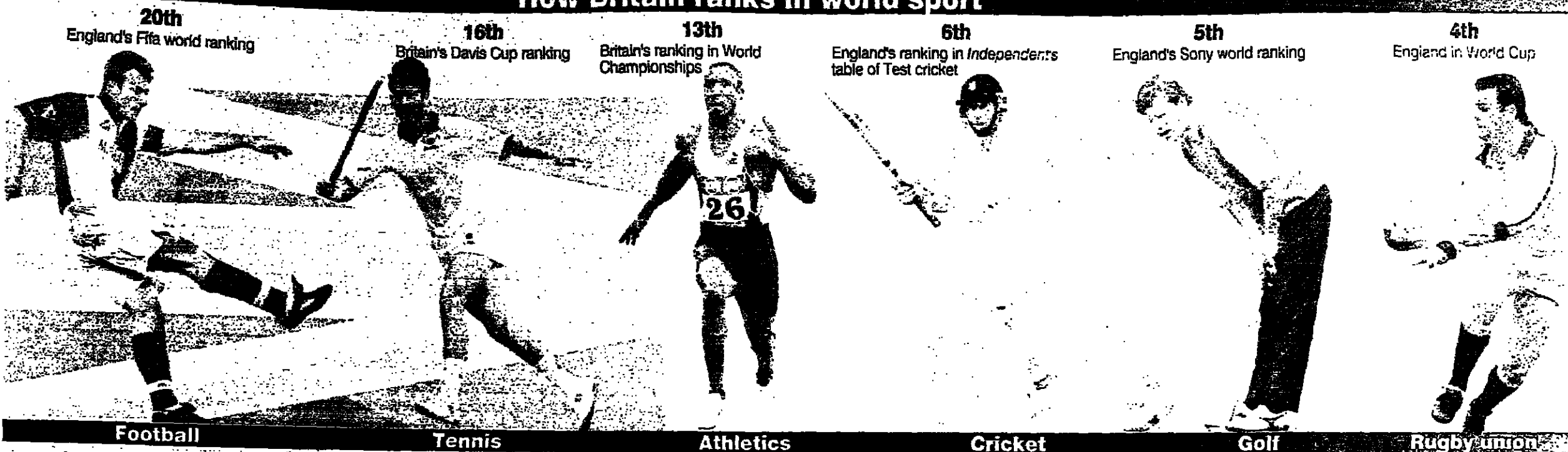
11. The attempt by some critics to compare the fate of the coup plotters with that of the convicts by Justice Auta's Ogoni Civil Disturbances Tribunal is misguided. The two cases are completely different. The Saro-Wiwa case is clearly criminal, involving murder. The penalty for such an offence which was not made by the Military but has always been part of Nigeria statute-book is clear. The penalty has been duly imposed. And there is no apology to offer anyone. It is true that many countries today like South Africa and the United Kingdom have removed death penalty from their statute-book. Nigeria has not yet done so. Consequently, for a country to seek to impose its own legal system on another smacks of undue interference and until the death sentence is removed from Nigeria's statute-book, the confirmation of the death sentences passed by the Tribunal is in order and well deserved.

Nigeria High Commission on behalf of the
Federal Government of Nigeria
Abuja, Nigeria.



news analysis

How Britain ranks in world sport



How many gold medals will £100m buy? Paul Vallely and Jim White look at the plan for a national academy of sport

A place where the nation can make heroes

Sport has always been a barometer of national self-image. This week it is Mike Atherton being offered as a metaphor for the grit, determination and stubbornness we would all like to see in ourselves in these troubled times. "He makes you proud to be English," Terry Venables was quoted as saying in the Sun.

The notion has considerable pedigree. There are those who feel that Harold Wilson only lost the 1970 general election because England's footballers had just been knocked out of the World Cup.

John Major wants to make sure the same thing doesn't happen to him. Yesterday the Sports Council announced the next stage in realising the Prime Minister's dream of creating a new generation of Athertons by establishing a £100m national academy of sport. Some 10,000 consultation documents are to be sent out to sporting bodies, coaches, sports scientists, dieticians, and, oh yes, to the athletes themselves, seeking their views on a project which is to be funded, of course, by the National Lottery.

British sportsmen and women have long envied the opportunities enjoyed by their rivals throughout the world. The United States has sporting facilities on its college campuses which are legendary, and which have for decades drawn many of the pick of British performers. But in recent times other nations have consciously established programmes, funded at great expense from the public purse, to nurture practitioners who will excel on the world stage.

Germany, following the post-war example of the countries of Eastern Europe, set up

a tennis academy in the Seventies from which Steffi Graf, Michael Stich and Boris Becker graduated. Sweden did something similar with tennis, and with football, in which it has rapidly left behind its joke-book status.

But the most dramatic example of sporting improvements nurtured by a state-sponsored academy is the Australian Institute of Sport, in Canberra. Set up after a series of disastrous performances in the 1976 Olympics, it has produced a turnaround that can be characterised, even without the usual sporting hyperbole, as

dramatic. Australia won twice as many golds as England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland put together at last year's Commonwealth Games, with just a third of the population. Nine out of 10 medallists were products of the Institute - as are many top cricket and rugby players. Shane Warne, the unstoppable leg spinner, entered the Australian Test team virtually straight out of the academy.

In a world where the difference between a gold and silver medal can be measured in minuscule fractions, the fine-tuning available in such an

establishment can mean the difference between success and failure. Teams of nutritionists, physiologists, psychologists, psychotherapists and biomechanics experts offer analysis and muscle power-ratio studies. They will instruct a hurdler on which muscle in the lower calf to develop to ensure crucial performance improvements, or make minute adjustments to the detailed timing of exercise routines to optimise training benefits.

British athletes who can afford to go there during the winter season - they include the 400-metre runner Roger Black,

the rower Steve Redgrave, the 110-metre hurdler Colin Jackson and the sprinter Linford Christie - speak of "a little paradise for serious athletes".

Sport has always been a serious business, and never more so than today. For sport is one of the main ways in which a nation can redefine its image in the world.

When New Zealand won the America's Cup earlier this year, the entire country donned red socks in homage to Peter Blake, the boat's captain, who had sported the same. More significantly, New Zealand businessmen touring the Far East in

search of inward investment proudly display pictures of the winning team on their brochures.

Ocean-going racing might be one of the least spectator-friendly activities invented, but clearly it is an important marketing tool when it comes to finding a symbol of the enterprise, determination and character that enabled this tiny nation to trounce the world's only sailing superpower.

No longer, Mr Major believes, can Britain afford to treat sport as something only to be played on Wednesday afternoons. The old stereotype of

the gentleman-amateur, with its tradition of Oxbridge Blues and insouciant grace, must finally be laid to rest. If the birth of the professional sportsman in Britain came comparatively late, all the more reason to run hard now for the finishing line.

The problem that the Prime Minister is attempting to address, however, will not be solved simply by focusing on an elite. The move to supply the academy with recruits from the nation's playing fields brings ministers up to the embarrassing realisation that previous Conservative initiatives have

pressed in the opposite direction. School sports fields were sold off during the Thatcher years. That was also the time when teachers, alienated by ministers' lack of trust, abandoned, along with their sense of vocation, much of their extramural sports activity: it has never recovered.

Deprived of facilities and goodwill, how could young English schoolboys compete with the opportunities given to someone like the England cricketer Robin Smith, who, when he was a boy in South Africa, attended an ordinary state school which had no fewer than 12 grass cricket nets with practice every night? When, a few years ago, the MCC launched an initiative to promote the game, they found only two primary schools in Greater London that still played cricket.

There's the rub. In Sweden, Germany and the United States they did not simply improve opportunities for the elite. They built scores of indoor tennis and football facilities for the mass of the population.

For there is another crucial dimension to the sporting experience. Beyond that of the circuit-hardened professional, or of the effortless exertions of the gentleman players, lies something much more basic. Sport has primarily to be an activity that ordinary people enjoy, without reference to national excellence. Without a base, a pyramid can have no apex.

In the world of sport as international marketing, of course, no such excuses can be accepted. And in the forum of national politics, such plain truth cannot compete with the call for bread and circuses.

View from the top: what the experts think of a new centre of sporting excellence



Cliff Morgan
Presenter, Sport on 4, former Welsh Rugby Union international

Anything that gives people the opportunity to improve themselves is admirable. In Australia, they've got an academy and they produce wonderful athletes, and one hopes the same thing could happen in this country. But an academy won't teach flair and imagination and genius.

Germany, following the post-war example of the countries of Eastern Europe, set up



Mickey Stewart
Former England cricket manager

I am all for a national academy because you need all the necessities of sport science and sport medicine. On the plus side, having different sports together, one rubs off on another. On the other hand, each sport has its own character and atmosphere which develops its own individual environment.



David Lloyd
Former British Davis Cup captain

It is absolutely necessary as long as it's done professionally and looked at very carefully. It is something that should have been done many years ago, but it must be done right, otherwise it's a waste of time. It should be like Australia. Especially with all that lottery money. They've more money than sense.



Tony Hallett
Secretary of the Rugby Football Union

It's an excellent initiative which in rugby we're trying to do simultaneously under the main umbrella of the academy. I hope it will bring us closer to the competitive edge of other countries in the southern hemisphere and America too, which we've rather lacked in the past.



Gary Jacobs
Former European boxing champion

It's a brilliant idea and not before time. The Government should take an interest. The kids in America manage to take on these sports scholarships and get a great education. They still excel in the classroom and get much better on the field.



Terry Venables
England football coach

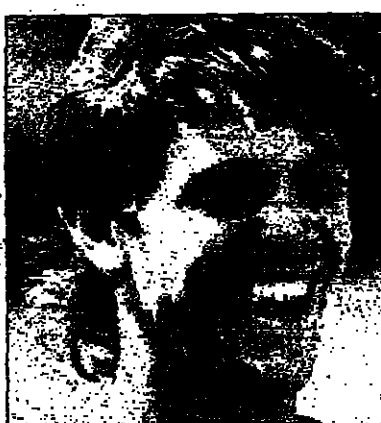
It's a great idea. It's good to monitor anything. If you monitor something, you can see if the kids involved are improving. Then you can concentrate on increasing the general standard all round.

Diary

JIM WHITE

Tuning in to watch the latter stages of Michael Atherton's elevation to sainthood on Monday, I found my attention wandering from the great man's performance (as it tends to do when eight runs are scored in an afternoon) and taking in some of the odd sights of South African cricket. The performance of the Soweto brass band in the stands, for instance, or the way Sky cameramen seem to be contractually obliged to scan the crowd for women in bikini tops; also the astonishing 3-D perspective of the Castle Lager advert painted on to the grass, a commercial optical illusion which makes you think the bowlers are going to trip over it every time they start their run-up.

Not that it was the only thing around to trip up the South Africans. Now we are at last exposed to the country's sportsmen, it is alarming to discover the preponderance of the Mullet haircut among its cricketers. This long-at-the-back-short-at-the-sides abomination popular in 1983 was thus named by Q magazine last month (though why the Mullet, no one, even at Q, can explain, sounds better than the bloater, presumably). The Mullet has long since been abandoned even by recalcitrant stylists like Ian Botham. But, a bit like marsupials evolving away from the influences of the rest of the world, it is still the rage in so recently isolated Johannesburg. Perhaps that was what was meant by separate development.



After apartheid, the Mullet ...

... and a bigger one from the man



The King of the Mullet, Michael Botham, narrowly escaped a hair crisis when he appeared on Top of the

It came as no surprise to a consumer called Bill Rich that in South Wales electricity has become big business. The week that worker-shareholders in SWALEC are trousering up to £21,000 in realised options as the company is absorbed by Welsh Water, the inappropriately named Mr Rich is entering his third year of dispute over his electricity bill. The problem is that Mr Rich and his family, in their escapist farmhouse in the middle of Powys, are reckoned by SWALEC to be running up the kind of charges more generally associated with market gardeners growing industrial quantities of cannabis under arc lamps.

"The average bill in Wales is £273 per year, yet ours is up to £2,000," says Mr Rich, who has seen demands for more than £900 a quarter pop through his letter box. "And SWALEC" - which he pronounces to rhyme with bollock - "seem clueless as to why it happens."

Mr Rich has been assiduous in his efforts to find out why a household that does not even possess a tumble-drier has been ratcheting up such extraordinary electricity use. Over the past couple of years his home has become a magnet for researchers: the electricity expert who reckoned it was a short circuit in the fridge (Mr Rich changed the fridge and the bills still came); the clummy-handed spiritualist who said it was the ghost of someone Bill had murdered in a past life popping round for a recharge (he had an exorcism and the bills still came); the conspiracy theorist who was convinced the meter was being affected by secret MoD experiments conducted locally into electronic warfare (call in the X-Files). The latest expert to befriend them is a retired electrical engineer called, I kid you not, DC Smith.

Late one afternoon last week Mr Rich had the regulators from Ofwat, the electricity watchdog, round. "They needed to switch off the supply in order to replace the meter," he recalled. "Naturally, it went dark, so they had to fetch a torch from their car. The batteries were flat." The wheel of the newly fitted meter, however, has been spinning as fast as

ever the old one did, for which no explanation is yet forthcoming.

"We've agreed to pay SWALEC £1 a day until it's sorted out," Mr Rich said. "In the end I fear they'll make us pay the arrears. The only way I'll be able to afford that is to become a SWALEC shareholder."

Those unable at present to find a suitable role for themselves, or who feel that their true worth is neglected by their employers, could do worse than pop over to Chicago. In the airport there, a local company is advertising that it can supply you with a "Video resume": a TV-CV, as it were. The copy gushes that a film crew "goes to your place of work and films you there. This gives the employer a sense of your work ethic." Even better: "if you are not currently employed, Career Videos will simulate a working environment in your area of expertise."

Sherrill Watson, the company's sales person, was momentarily nonplussed when I rang with my request to simulate the working environment of a roving ambassador of goodwill, a secret night visitor to the sick and dying, and a Queen of Hearts. Not to be defeated by a minor problem, however, Ms Watson asked if the offices of a local public relations company would suffice as a back-drop. Sounds perfect.

If Gillian Shepherd, the Education Secretary, hoped her proposal to encourage schoolchildren to talk proper like what she does would be a vote winner, she should have consulted some of her constituents first. A colleague was in a pub in her South Norfolk constituency over the weekend, where she was harangued by the landlord for not speaking in an East Anglian dialect.

"I had that Gillian Shepherd in here the other day," he growled. "An' I told 'er an' all. You get up at that Tory conference, I tell'er, tellin' folks to talk like someone from the bleedin' BBC. Call yourself an East Anglian? I zezz. Destroying our 'eritage, that's what yur doin'." God knows what he would have said to Virginia Bottomley.

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Labour must do better with sums

The launch of Labour's new policy document on schools yesterday marks a fundamental shift in the left's approach to education. For decades, under-achievement in Britain's schools has been too easily explained away by the social and economic background of the children involved. Schools in the inner cities were never expected to deliver the same academic success as their counterparts in the leafy suburbs. The disadvantages were regarded as too great, with many of their pupils coming from homes without books, without fathers, or without parents who speak English as their mother tongue.

But the left has often done the disadvantaged few favours by its attitudes. Low expectations of children generate low self-esteem and probably low qualifications. Meanwhile real inadequacies in schools can be missed when little is expected of their pupils. The misguided acceptance of low standards has helped to sustain an education system in which large numbers of teenagers leave school without basic literacy and numeracy skills.

Yesterday, Tony Blair and David Blunkett broke with the past. They announced, in effect, that poor standards would not be tolerated. They want to set targets and monitoring mechanisms for every pupil, parent, teacher, headteacher, school and local authority. It is a good start. But can they deliver the improvements?

Two main areas of Labour's policy suggest that they could make a considerable difference. The first is increasing parental participation in their children's education. Drawing families into schools is essential, for if mum and dad don't think qualifications count, the children are unlikely to work hard in the classroom. In addition,

Labour proposes setting minimum levels of homework, and parents would be expected to make sure their kids sat down to do it rather than watching television. The second big plank of Labour's policy is improving the quality of teaching and leadership in schools. Teachers and headteachers who are not up to the job should be sacked, as Labour suggests.

We need this stick, but what about the carrots? Good teachers also need to be recruited, encouraged and inspired. Mr Blunkett clearly recognises this. He proposes both a General Teaching Council and a new teaching position - an "Advanced Skills Teacher" - for long-serving, successful teachers who do not want to be promoted into administration.

Unsurprisingly, however, Labour does not tackle the real problem of pay. If we are really to attract bright graduates into teaching, salary scales for successful teachers will have to rise.

In the end, it is hard to propose convincing policies for improving schools where large numbers of pupils have language or behavioural problems without confronting the issue of resources. New and dynamic headteachers need to be able to appoint the best teachers on salaries that reward them for the difficult task they are taking on. More should be invested in special needs, and remedial help for literacy and numeracy weaknesses. In a political environment unfriendly to tax increases, that means finding savings elsewhere.

All the more reason why Labour should spell out its spending priorities before a general election. Until they do so, it is impossible to know how much difference they are really prepared to make to Britain's schools.

To beef or not to beef...

Ministers tell us that beef products are absolutely safe. There is, says the Health Secretary, Stephen Dorrell, "no conceivable risk" to the public; he would let his own children eat hamburgers. Dr Kenneth Calman, the Chief Medical Officer, would be happy to join them.

Yet the prospect of bumping into either of them in McDonald's is not wholly reassuring. Despite their advice, more and more people are giving up eating beef products for fear that they might become infected with a human form of BSE, better known as mad cow disease. Some are abstaining quietly and privately. Others are more public, with some parents insisting that beef should be taken off the school dinner menu. A number of eminent scientists have announced that they have given up pies and burgers which might contain offal. We may be on the brink of a panic that could severely damage the beef industry.

The problem is that we do not know whom to believe: the scaremongers, the worried scientists or statements from Whitehall. In the past, we would have accepted the word of a health secretary. But respect for politicians has sunk so low that their every utterance is regarded with cynicism.

Governments, after all, have an unreliable record when it comes to protecting public health. Recently, on the positive side, this particular administration was quick to go public on the dangers posed by certain types of contraceptive pill. Thousands of women switched brands in

a matter of weeks. But the same government has also refused to order a total ban on the advertising of cigarettes, the only product which, if used according to the makers' specifications, is likely to kill.

Such a ban might damage tax revenue from cigarettes. Likewise, anything less than trenchant backing for the beef industry could lead to a sudden collapse of confidence in its products. No government wants to be held responsible for killing off a major British industry.

In short, there are plenty of reasons for doubting ministers when they express their love of hamburgers. That is why we need an independent assessment of the dangers posed to humans by BSE in cattle.

There is already an advisory group, comprising respectable scientists, which briefs the Government and the public on the threat. It has been more equivocal than Mr Dorrell about the risks, warning that it may be several years until complete reassurance can be given. But however earnest and conscientious this advisory body is, it can never command the trust of the public. It is simply too close to the Government.

A Royal Commission, with statutory powers, independent of the Ministry of Agriculture, should be established to give us a trustworthy picture of beef's safety. Its brief could be widened to cover other foods. Such a commission might not be able to provide all the answers. But at least everyone could make an informed choice as possible before deciding their future eating habits.

ANOTHER VIEW Tim Sweeney

Take note: banks do care

In Biblical times, money-lenders were the first to be thrown out of the temple. By the age of Shakespeare things had not got that much better, and the money-lender was still seen as a "pound of flesh" merchant. Reading the tabloid press of today, you would not think that much had changed. Banks and bankers are too often a public enemy.

Populist pressure groups are quick to rise to the cry that banks are uncaring, unsympathetic and generally deserve eternal damnation for their sins. Unfortunately, they tend to forget the context. With 54 million personal accounts, and millions of transactions every day, some mistakes will happen - but fortunately they represent a tiny percentage of the total. Of course banks make mistakes, and of course there are improvements to be made to services. No one denies this. However, it is wrong to think that banks make a lot of mistakes routinely or wilfully.

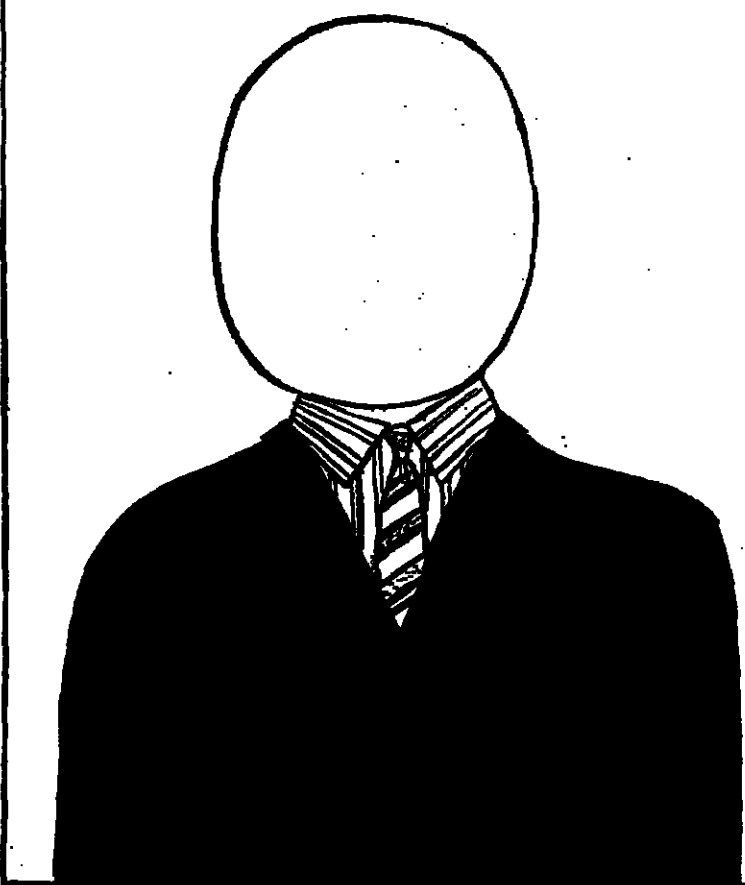
The tone of this week's National Consumer Council report is that banks do not care about customer service, particularly when the customer is poor or has fallen on hard times. This is simply not true. Customer care is a primary concern of the banks and forms the basis of the fierce competition within the industry, even for the small percentage of those who fall into financial difficulties. All banks' corporate strategies place service and good client relationships at the top of their agenda. Competition within the industry means that millions are spent to improve service.

The NCC's report, which criticises elements of the banks' service to customers, contains comments and ideas that deserve careful study. Any suggestions that may help banks to improve further the service they provide will be looked at very seriously. It is in their competitive interest to do so. However, the figures simply do not justify the broad-brush criticism levelled. The NCC report was based on discussion groups consisting of no more than 70 people, some of whom did not even have a bank account. This is a very small sample compared with the individual banks' regular surveys of more than 400,000 customers.

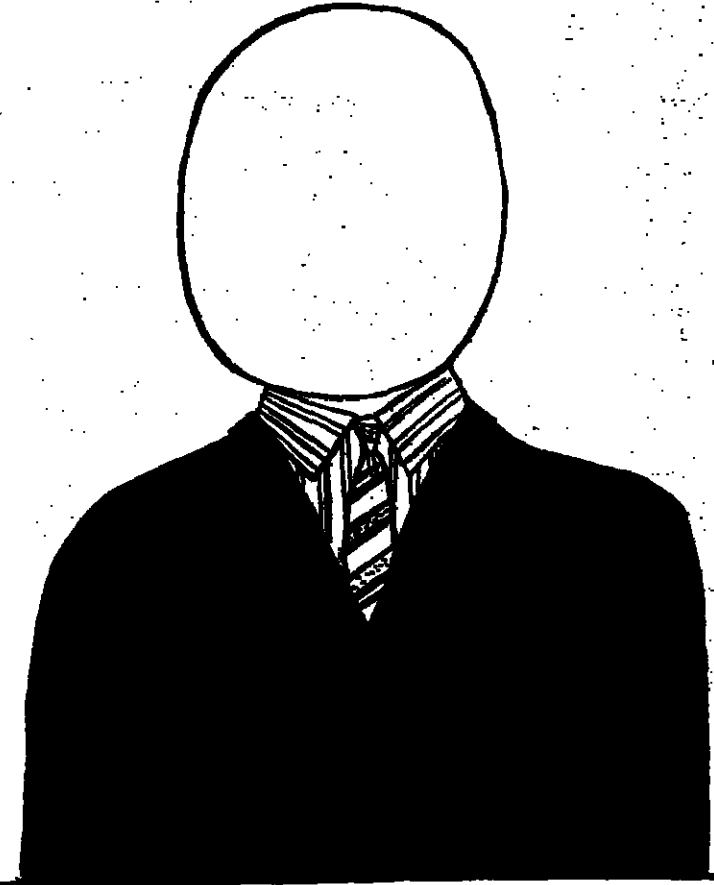
Figures produced by the independent Banking Ombudsman tell a different story: in the annual report for 1994-5, the number of preliminary complaints recorded dropped by 16 per cent, while the number of genuine complaints accepted for full investigation fell by 14 per cent. This suggests that things are getting better, not worse. Looked at over a two-year period, the evidence for both categories shows complaints down by as much as a third. Banking is one of Britain's most successful industries. Service improvements are more likely if we stop using emotive, anecdotal evidence to fuel prejudice against banks. Instead, we should look at the figures objectively and concentrate on constructive suggestions.

The writer is director-general of the British Bankers' Association.

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Spot the difference

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Singular view of cohabitation

From Mr Geoffrey Thompson
Sir: I purchased a copy of *Something to Celebrate* in July and now I read that the Archbishop of Canterbury is "not the type to stand by while his church sanctions living in sin" ("Keeping the faith - and no messing", 2 December).

The report of the Church of England's Board of Social Responsibility resulted from wide, practical and scholarly consultation, and carries the sub-title "Valuing families in Church and Society". A highly respectable document, its constructive deliberations contrast markedly with the pronouncement by Dr George Carey on cohabitation. The report is sensitive to today's situations, offering "balanced comment and a positive understanding of cohabitation."

In this parish, as in most, responsible cohabitation is a result not only of social trends but of economic practicalities. Some young couples have postponed marriage because of acute unemployment problems. Where a dilemma is apparent, love draws a couple together without the need for a formal marriage pronouncement, in spite of the stigma of "living in sin."

In practice, our cultural norm of traditional marriage should not be compared exclusively with the Christian love imperative. So, who is giving wise leadership in

this matter - the church's Board of Social Responsibility, Dr Carey or evangelical dogma?
Yours sincerely,
GEOFFREY THOMPSON
Diocesan Reader
Walney Island, Cumbria
2 December

From Mrs Barbara Bingley
Sir: In his condemnation of living in sin, the Archbishop of Canterbury demonstrated the former line on moral dilemmas that the Church of England is expected to take. This firmness makes it easier for us to discuss guidelines by which to live. However, I am saddened to find that there is never any mention of the genuine problems to which this outright condemnation can lead.

Some of us in our sixties who live together for mutual support and comfort have reluctantly chosen to do so because of the inequitable state of English pension law regarding widows, and particularly divorced widows. I realise no divorce is an ideal, but when a marriage has broken down irretrievably, and there are no young children involved, it is painful that because of widespread ignorance of these legal inadequacies, we should be condemned as perpetual sinners.

Yours sincerely,
BARBARA BINGLEY
Nayland, Suffolk

Wind is blowing towards turbines

From Sir Simon Gourlay
Sir: In his letter of 4 December, vice-chairman Robert Woodward of Country Guardian is at least consistent. He dislikes the look of wind turbines and the impact they have on the landscape. Fair enough; the question of what is beautiful and what is ugly is essentially a subjective matter and it is inevitable that there will be varying opinions.

However, there are many aspects of wind power generation that are not open to subjective assessment. In consistently ignoring the huge technical progress of the last 10 years (to suggest that today's machines have the same power output relative to their size as they did 100 years ago is nonsense), which has helped reduce the price of wind-generated electricity from over 11p per kilowatt-hour to under 5p in the most recent non-fossil fuel bid round, he underlines the paucity of his case.

Mr Woodward also stresses his view that wind turbines can never make a significant contribution to

our energy requirements. The new generation of turbines will enable around 12 per cent to be produced without the need for wind turbines "on every hill". And without the need for a "heavily subsidised price". Of the levy we all pay on our electricity bills, 95 per cent goes to the nuclear industry, only 5 per cent to renewables.

Perhaps in choosing to make a (misleading) comparison between output from wind power and that from the coal-powered Drax power station, Mr Woodward was administering the *coup de grace* to his own foot. A recent report has identified Drax as the dirtiest power station in Great Britain, responsible for considerable damage to several Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Ironically, the Department of the Environment spends significant sums to protect SSSIs. When it comes to truly clean power, wind and water are impossible to beat, a fact which happily is being recognised by an ever-increasing number of people.

Yours sincerely,
SIMON GOURLAY
Knighton, Powys
4 December

Who'll vouch for it?

From Mr Alastair Campbell
Sir: Despite being given an emphatic denial of your story "Blair set to accept Tory nursery vouchers" (5 December), John Rentoul stated as a matter of fact both that Tony Blair had decided to accept the Government's nursery vouchers scheme, and that David Blunkett was considering a plan to trump it by offering higher-value vouchers. To substantiate his story, Mr Rentoul quotes anonymous "sources" saying Mr Blair is "sympathetic" to the shift in policy. I have no way

of knowing who these sources may be, but they are talking rot. The first Mr Blair knew of this notion was when I told him Mr Rentoul was writing about it. The first Mr Blunkett knew of the plan to "trump" the vouchers scheme was likewise when he heard of Mr Rentoul's latest effort. As the story has given rise to a number of calls from interested parties, I would be grateful if you could publish this letter.

Yours sincerely,
ALASTAIR CAMPBELL
Press Secretary to Tony Blair
House of Commons
London, SW1

Letters should be addressed to Letters to the Editor and include a daytime telephone number. (Fax: 071-293 2054; e-mail: letters@independent.co.uk) Letters may be edited for length and clarity. We regret that we are unable to acknowledge unpublished letters.

Shelling out presents to Nigerian chiefs

From Mr Emeke Achebe
Sir: The clear implication of your correspondent David Orr in his article "Shell was over village with cash and liquor" (1 December) that hard cash and a few bottles of liquor was all it takes to convince communities to accept an oil rig in their area is insulting to the people of the Niger Delta. The lawyers, doctors, university lecturers, senior civil servants and a range of other professionals who come from these communities - indeed, most Nigerians - might be as disturbed as I am over the compulsion between the people of the delta today and "19th-century natives" won over by gifts of colourful beads and fine cloths.

If Mr Orr understands the traditions and customs of Nigeria, he knows that any citizen formally visiting a community other than his own would pay his or her respects by presenting a gift of some substance, usually liquor and kola nuts, or a token in lieu. The same behaviour is rightly expected of Shell, which spent about £1,000 hosting a gathering of council chiefs and the people of the Greater Bonny Area, comprising several communities, including Sangama. The chiefs

jointly plan community development for the entire area to ensure an integrated approach.

This goodwill exercise should not be confused with Shell's community initiatives, which are based on providing lasting benefits to the communities. For example, communities of the Greater Bonny Area benefit from a youth training scheme, annual scholarships for secondary and university students, provision of schoolteachers, hospital equipment, a road, water scheme, and electricity, as well as agricultural assistance for farmers. Two new projects are a library, now being commissioned, and the renovation of a community secondary school.

Yours faithfully,
EMEKE ACHEBE
General Manager
Shell Petroleum Development Company
Lagos, Nigeria
4 December

From Mr Gordon Glas
Sir: May I reply to the three letters today (1 December) of self-justification from Shell? My presentation on global corporate and political values to the London Business School Business

Ethics Forum on Tuesday used Anita Roddick's "Another View" (28 November) to provoke discussion on Shell's actions. Support appeared to be evenly split, with strong feelings in both camps.

What became crystal clear, though, is that the Body Shop's published credo is simply to "care for people, animals and the environment", while high on the list of Shell's published values are "responsibilities to shareholders" and "profitability is essential": caring and human rights are excluded. Many companies are learning that the inclusion of the pursuit of money in their values leads, unsurprisingly, to conflict and allegations of greed. I wish our government would learn that lesson, too.

The route for personal and corporate development is to recognise that criticism provides an opportunity for learning and change rather than more self-justification.

Yours faithfully,
GORDON GLAS
Director
2020 Vision
Bath,
Avon
1 December

Let's put the UK back in Unesco

From Mr Bruce Kent and others
Sir: As members of the newly formed Forum for UN Renewal, we urge our government to take immediate steps to rejoin Unesco. It is now 10 years since the UK left this important UN specialist agency.

Whatever the reasons at the time for leaving, they are no longer valid. Under the leadership of Dr Federico Mayor, Unesco has not only reformed itself, but also continues to play a vital role in the fields of education, science, art, culture

and environmental protection. It is 50 years since Clement Attlee, Rab Butler and Julian Huxley played such important roles in the creation of Unesco. Today it is ridiculous that Britain should be on the outside, instead of playing a positive role from within. Yours faithfully, BRUCE KENT, Chair, Forum for UN Renewal; LOUISE ZANKE, Pax Christi; JANET BLOOMFIELD, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament; IAN LINDEN, Catholic Institute for International Relations; MICHAEL IRENE, United Nations Association Forum for UN Renewal London, NW 4 December

The truth about Santa will out

From Mr John Rawlins
Sir: "Bah!" roared Scrooge, "Humbly!" "Lies, all lies!" screeches your correspondent, Anna Freeman (letter, 2 December).

How dreary! Once a year the notion of Father Christmas provides an opportunity to bring a little happiness, fun and kindness into the lives of children all over the world, even in some countries where the traditional "myths" are very different from our own.

"Pretending" provides one of the joys of childhood, all too soon to be overtaken by the necessity of having to face up to the realities of life. Was there ever a child that suffered injury from having believed in Father Christmas and his reindeer?

In any case if, as Anna Freeman asserts, God and heaven are

myths, how on earth can it be a sin to tell lies? Yours faithfully, JOHN RAWLINS, Hoin, Devon 4 December

From Mr John Douch
Sir: Aged four, I was taken to see Father Christmas, seated in his grotto at our local department store. Questioned as to my wants for Christmas, I replied "a fairy bike" (as children's bicycles were then termed). Some 66 years later, I remember his words to this day: "You shall have it, my son." The much-wanted present never materialised - how could it have, given my parents' financial situation? As far as I was concerned, there existed no need for any further outside influence to destroy my belief in that particular myth. Yours faithfully, JOHN DOUCH, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire

Shanghai'd Scots

From Sir Alastair Stewart
Sir: Having a father and grandfather who both spent their 21st birthdays in Shanghai, I read Niall Ferguson's article "The last ilk of the British Empire" (4 December) with some interest. In both cases, they were younger sons with few prospects at home, no fortune, but

a good Scottish education. Seeking one's fortune used to be considered a laudable thing to do.

Mr Ferguson, from his name, is presumably a Scot who has sought his fortune in England, moving to where the opportunities offer. Does he consider himself an ilk? Yours etc, ALASTAIR STEWART, Little Baddow, Essex

The threat from the Bible

From Mr R. V. Wells
Sir: The Rev Gilbert Markus (letter, 1 December) has completely missed the point of Luther's translations of the Bible. His was not a translation of St Jerome's Latin Vulgate, it was a new translation of the Greek and Hebrew originals, of which the Vulgate itself was a translation.

Brasmas had produced a printed edition of the Greek Testament in 1516. Luther and Tyndale followed this in 1522 and 1526 respectively with translations of it into German and English. Martin Luther managed to complete his Bible by translating the Old Testament from the Greek and Hebrew, bypassing the Vulgate and going back to the original texts. Tyndale was not so lucky, he was burnt at the stake before he could complete his Old Testament.

It was these translations of the Bible from the original languages that outraged the Roman Catholic Church, making it feel threatened, not new translations of St Jerome's Latin version of them.

Yours faithfully,
R. V. WELLS
Widley, Hampshire

Passing sentence

From Dr Stephen Butterworth
Sir: Stephen Ward's report on the Major proposals for Ireland ("Major takes rhubarb rap for Ulster gobbledegook", 4 December) describes them as gobbledegook because the average bledgook sentence is 35 words. He tells us that for moderately complex subjects, the average sentence length should be less than 20 words. A swift calculation shows that his own score, disregarding quotes, is 28 words. Is this, therefore, minor gobbledegook, as distinct from Major? Yours sincerely, at 15 words a sentence, STEPHEN T. G. BUTTERWORTH, Staplehurst, Kent

comment

Patients' champion the NHS should fear

John Spiers is the man the medical establishment loves to hate. He is about to get his revenge

The Department of Health must be ruing the day they selected a "safe" right-wing Tory multi-millionaire to chair the Brighton Healthcare NHS Trust. If they thought they had got themselves just another political yes man, like so many others appointed at the start of the health reforms, they know now they were wrong. But it is bad news for the NHS bureaucracy, it is likely to be very good news indeed for patients.

John Spiers has just been appointed chairman of the Patients Association. What's that? Barely heard of it? You will. This quiet, respectable charity founded in 1963, part-financed by the Department of Health, has hardly been a player in the past few years of radical NHS change. Preferring to operate through nodes and whiskers in the corridors of power, enjoying an intimate if unhealthy relationship with the mighty Royal Colleges of the medical profession, its voice has been muted.

No longer. Nothing John Spiers does is muted. He is the megaphone without the diplomacy. He makes Mike Tyson seem uncombative. "The NHS belongs to patients, not to the medical establishment" is his motto. Oh, how the Department of Health will rue the day!

The story so far. Spiers, aged 53, made his fortune in publishing. A right-wing Tory in Brighton, a JP, on countless boards and charities, he was appointed to the Brighton Healthcare chairmanship in 1991. To the disgust of the doctors, he was famous for hymning the praises of Virginia Bottomley in honeyed, cooing tones. When I first met him, he was sitting in his office at the hospital, his feet up

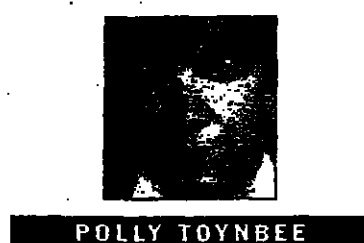
on his desk, dressed in a bright white suit, surrounded by dazzling modern paintings (he is a collector), with a photo of Bottomley taking pride of place on his wall.

From the start, he called himself "the voice of Joe Public". He outraged hospital staff by getting into a wheelchair incognito, in his own accident and emergency department, pretending to have lost all feeling in his legs. He was told to wait five hours; a porter swore at him; a nurse told him he'd have to wait 20 minutes to be taken to a disabled toilet on another floor. This, he said, was the "invisible hospital" that NHS managers never saw.

He regards the Patients' Charter as nothing of the kind and intends to campaign for the real thing - what he calls a "Patient's Patients' Charter". Instead of measuring the hotel services and the waiting times in the NHS, it will test the things people most want and need to know: how good is the treatment? How good is the doctor? What are the outcomes for this procedure under this consultant?

In Brighton, Spiers set up a clinical performance unit to measure the quality of his own doctors, designed to link the results eventually to doctors' pay. No other manager anywhere had gone as far as this, and the doctors rebelled. The British Medical Association declared war. The standing consultants' committee passed a near-unanimous vote of no confidence in him.

Expecting support, he found his friends in the Health Department, even his Blessed Virginia, looking the other way in embarrassment. So he resigned, the first NHS trust chairman to be ousted by doctors.



POLLY TOYNEE
In its treachery the Department of Health may have unleashed an unguided missile

The department's formal statement noted only that he was "lively" and this was an internal affair for the trust. In their treachery, they may have unleashed an unguided missile.

The glee I detected in Spiers's eye as he bounded out of his first Patients Association council meeting to meet me betokens his determination to set about the medical establishment with renewed vim. The timid old Patients Association may have little idea what a hand grenade they have unpinned. His ideas aren't radical, they are revolutionary.

First, he wants league tables of all doctors' results collected and published. The BMA throws its hands up in horror. How can you compare a doctor doing routine work with a doctor who takes on risky cases? Jim Johnson, head of the BMA Consultants Committee, says: "I could cut my death rate by 10 per cent, no problem.

I'd just refuse the iffy ones." He adds: "If you collect the figures, they should only be given to managers, never to patients." Another doctors' spokesman concurs: "We wouldn't want to frighten the patients."

These are the attitudes that Spiers intends to demolish. Publish and be damned, he says, since only by publishing will the tables be refined to take subtleties into account. The Government was tempted but has backed off providing these tables in England and Wales, unwilling to stir up doctors before an election.

Such figures as there are (all preserve doctors' anonymity) show that the specialist teams of doctors which treat the most cases do best, while the "dabblers" in general surgery are the most dangerous. The BMA retorts that general surgeons are the backbone of the NHS, staffing the district general hospitals where it would be impossible to have surgeons in every specialism. But Spiers is always one jump ahead: "Just so. That is why district general hospitals have to go. People will have to travel further to very large regional centres, for cancer or anything serious, where there is round-the-clock coverage by consultants on duty in every field. You need properly staffed specialist ambulances to transport people farther to get better care."

All the recent major reports into various aspects of the NHS back him up. Specialism is best and worth travelling for. The trouble is, patients don't want it. They cling to every killer cottage hospital or dearly loved local crumbling Victorian pile, where too many exhausted junior doctors carry

out complex emergency operations unsupervised. Small and local may be popular, but except for minor treatments it is neither safe nor economic. Yet how are patients to know that, unless the figures are published? Spiers sees it as his job to educate patients better to demand the things that really matter. To do that, he needs the figures.

He also wants public assessments of GPs, and is demanding that GPs open their clinics at times people can use them, between 6pm and 9pm, and at weekends. He wants to remove GPs' right to dump troublesome or unprofitable patients.

The Patients Association has a large corporate membership of NHS trusts, and a very small individual patient membership of well below a thousand. The trouble with patient power is that it has no democratic basis and so is not a legitimate estate within the NHS. Spiers intends to conduct six major opinion polls a year to sound out patient opinion far and wide. He needs to prove that he has popular patient support if he is going to carry real authority.

John Spiers is an extremist. Almost all his criticisms of the way the NHS is run are absolutely right but lacking finesse. As a manager, he tried to do too much too soon and offended too many potential allies among the good doctors. But as a professional protester and patients' advocate, he has found his métier. If he can establish the reputation of the Patients Association as a bona fide popular group, he may at last provide the missing genuine voice of the consumer within the NHS.

Have I got news for you, or not?

We all like to think that we follow the news pretty closely, but do we really? How aware are we of the latest developments in world events? For instance, how well would we do when faced with a simple test on this week's news?

Well, let's find out! Here is a simple test. I'm going to print several "news stories" taken from the last few days, and all you have to do is say which ones are true, and which ones are made up. It's as easy as that.

Here we go now!

1. Stephen Dorrell's blitz on bureaucracy in the NHS, which is hoped to get rid of 30,000 jobs, will create a new team of more than 40,000 "bureaucrat-busters" whose job it will be to eliminate waste and overmanning.

2. Professor Sir Michael Howard, the eminent war historian, is suing the Home Secretary, Michael Howard, on the grounds that the use of their name by the latter is cheapening the reputation of the former. He wants Michael Howard either to change his name or resign.

3. One of the most scathing reviews of the new Beatles single "Free as a Bird" was written by, of all people, John Lennon. Among his papers was found a dismissal of the song by the composer as "a tawdry bit of sentiment", and an added note to the effect that "if Paul and George get their hands on this, I only hope the song will self-destruct out of a perverse sense of self-preservation".

4. Dave Lee Travis, the erstwhile Radio 1 disc jockey, is suing the inventors of the bacon, lettuce and tomato sandwich. This unlikely court action has come about because Dave Lee Travis's career has slowed up recently and he blames this on the similarity between his familiar initials, DLT and the familiar abbreviation for the sandwich, BLT. He does not claim that anyone confuses one with the other but that his initials (which came first) have been overshadowed by the universal sandwich name. He is seeking £3m in damages, or sandwiches for life. Legal experts are following the case keenly, as it is the first time a snack has been sued by a jock.

5. A poll taken among the US peace-keeping force being sent out by President Clinton reveals that 10 per cent of them think they are going to Bosnia, 25 per cent to Northern Ireland and 65 per cent to the rougher parts of Washington DC.

6. The current wave of strike action in France is, it turns out, in protest against the Tahitian government's bomb-testing programme, which involves a random series of explosions in the middle of Paris.

7. The British government has devised a new campaign to

defuse scare stories about "mad cow disease" or BSE. It is inventing a series of abbreviations which all bear the initials BSE so that very soon the initials BSE will lose their association with killer hamburgers. Among these new meanings of BSE are the new British Standards Executive, British Subways (Eastern), the Birmingham School of Ethics, the Bank of Scotland and Edinburgh, and the Bloody Scott Enquiry, as the Scott enquiry is known familiarly in cabinet circles. The Government is also thinking of asking the film censor to introduce a new film category of "BSE" ("Brutality, Sex and Ennui").

8. Which sporting feat this week was described as "perhaps the greatest act of endurance in modern games"? Was it: a) Atherton's innings which denied South Africa victory in the second Test? b) the performance of any TV viewer who persevered to the end of the lat-



MILES KINGSTON

est snooker tournament: c) an official government judgement on anyone who gets involved with a business scheme with Terry Venables?

9. A memo was recently circulated at the Home Office, warning all personnel not to trust any memos circulated in the next fortnight, as these were all going to be false memos designed to be leaked to the Labour Party to spread disinformation there. Unfortunately, the initial memo was leaked to the Labour Party.

10. The Queen Mother's hip replacement operation was not due for several months yet, but she was ordered to have it early in order to steal the royal limelight back from Princess Diana. The idea was that as the Queen Mum is the only royal who commands anything like the same support as Diana, she should be used as swiftly as possible to repair the damage done by "Dianarama", hence her visit to hospital and very public re-emergence. What is not so well-known is that the surgeons thought she was not ready for the hip replacement and the Queen Mother did not actually have the operation this time - she merely went through the motions - which is why she appeared to be walking so well afterwards. Her hip will be done in private next month.

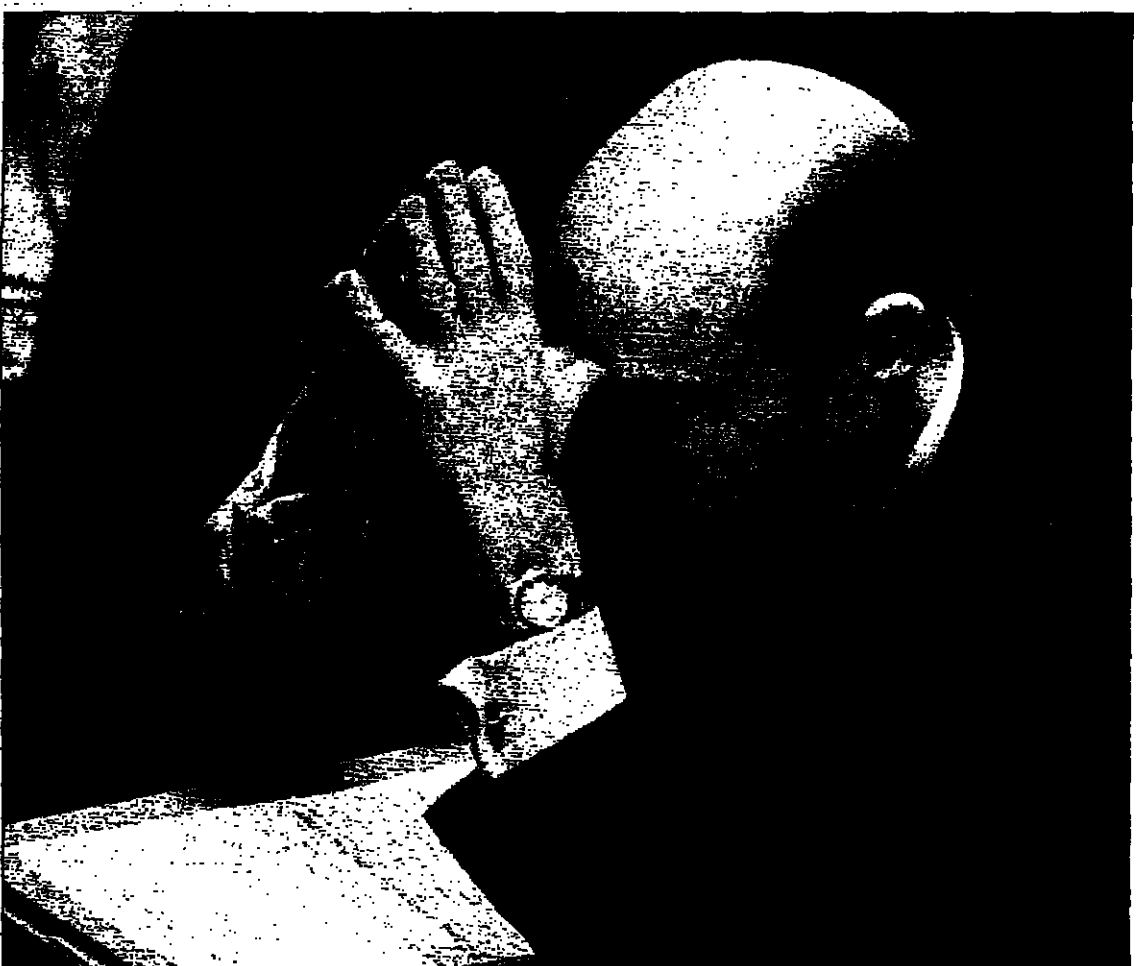
Answers: they are all true, but all officially denied.

France's strikers embody a wider hostility that Europe's leaders failed to foresee at Maastricht

The battle for Europe's future

When France sneezes, Europe catches a cold. It was true in 1789, 1848 and 1968, and now it may be true for the last years of this century. As each day passes, the social convulsions gripping France acquire the potential to shatter every assumption made by Europe's leaders about our political and economic future.

The plan, as devised in Maastricht in December 1992, was that Germany, France, and as many other European Union countries as possible would launch a single currency by January 1999 at the latest. The EU would simultaneously take a substantial step towards political union. These measures, the most ambitious since the six



Bonjour tristesse: Alain Juppé before yesterday's vote of confidence Photograph: Charles Platiau/Reuters

single currency on schedule. Certainly, when Mr Chirac meets Chancellor Helmut Kohl in the German spa town of Baden-Baden tomorrow, it will be extraordinary if either leader hints at a problem with the Maastricht scenario. Immense political will lies behind the single currency project, and neither Mr Chirac nor Mr Kohl will abandon it without a titanic fight.

Yet the odds appear to be increasingly stacked against the French government. Its deficit-cutting strategy depends on achieving a degree of economic growth this year and in 1996 that few independent economists think is within reach. Growth is bound to be hit by the combined impact of the austerity programme and the strikes.

Should the government make major concessions on public spending, the markets will punish the franc in the belief that France will fail to meet the Maastricht targets. With France

knocked out as a contender for monetary union, the EU would drop 1999 as the launch date, since everyone accepts that the project makes no sense without French participation.

However, the EU would probably try to set a later date for monetary union rather than abandon it altogether. Whether the markets would find that credible is another matter.

With a mighty effort, France could meet the Maastricht conditions. If it does, however, the cost will be high in terms of unemployment, job insecurity, higher taxes, reduced welfare benefits and a society divided from its government. By committing himself to cutting the budget deficit in conformity with Maastricht's timetable, Mr Chirac has already been forced to drop the most prominent of his many election promises last spring: the pledge to wage war on unemployment.

At 11.5 per cent of the workforce,

or almost 3 million people, unemployment is seen by many French as their country's most serious social ill. Advocates of the single currency say it will cure unemployment by providing exceptionally stable conditions for economic growth, including low interest rates and low inflation. But even if this happy forecast is accurate, it cannot come true until some time after 1999, and it is unclear that French public opinion will wait patiently for the promised land while being subjected to rigorous austerity measures.

In Germany, too, public opinion is a problem. Surveys repeatedly indicate that Germans will refuse to give up the Deutschmark, their most precious symbol of post-war success, unless the single currency is as rock-solid in value. The ecu, the EU's notional currency since 1981, has been anything but rock-solid, declining steadily against the mark over the years.

The German fear of substituting a weak Euro-currency for the mark is so intense that Mr Kohl's centre-right government and the Social Democratic opposition have recently been out-bidding each other in an effort to secure even tougher conditions for monetary union than are stipulated in Maastricht. Theo Waigel, Germany's Finance Minister, has proposed a system of fines on countries that practise lax budgetary discipline after joining the single currency.

The Maastricht treaty is, indeed, flawed in that the rules for ensuring responsible economic policies after the start of monetary union are somewhat vague. But Mr Waigel's main point is

Neither Chirac nor Kohl will abandon the single currency without a titanic fight

that Germany will not go ahead with the single currency unless all other participants are up to scratch - in fact, more than up to scratch - on low budget deficits, low public debts, a stable exchange rate and all the other Maastricht criteria. This has two far-reaching implications.

First, it means there is practically no chance that Italy and Spain could form part of monetary union in 1999. Bitter recriminations, even a blocking policy, can be expected from the governments in Rome and Madrid, fearful of being locked into an EU second division for southerners. There is also a question mark over Belgium's ability to meet the Maastricht conditions, but no one has yet dared address the difficulty of having a single currency that excludes the country which hosts the European Commission and whose capital is synonymous with the EU.

The second implication is that France itself will be pushed into ever more deflationary policies in an effort to fulfil Germany's strict new demands. In such circumstances social tensions can only grow, and the pressure on Mr Chirac to reverse course will intensify accordingly.

However, we are not quite there yet. Those who are betting against monetary union starting as planned in 1999 could still lose their money. It will be a battle fought to the last, with nothing less than the destiny of Europe at stake.

Generation Why



by Tony Reeve and Steve Way

Why bother? She'll probably die anyway

It's true her chances of survival are less than children in this country - but it's not hopeless. If you sponsor a child like Thani through ACTIONAID you'll not only improve her chances of survival, but you'll also give her a better opportunity in life. By working closely with the child's community we can provide access to safe water, health care, education, agricultural training and a means of earning their own living.

In return for your support, you'll receive a photo and message, from the child you sponsor. And you'll always know exactly how your money is helping through regular project reports from our field workers.

Sponsoring a child really can help change the future. So why not do it today?

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I am interested in sponsoring a child.

☐ I'd like to know more about the project.

☐ I can't sponsor a child now, but I'd like a gift of:

☐ £20 ☐ £10 ☐ £5 ☐ £2

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ACTIONAID

DEPENDENT SECTION 1

How Yorkshire Water just keeps rolling along



COMMENT

The company may have failed to get its message across to its customers and industry regulators, but in the City its explanation for the water shortages – an act of God and geography – is widely accepted.

Anyone who watched the *Panorama* programme on Yorkshire Water the other night would be left wondering why on earth heads haven't yet rolled at this beleaguered utility. The programme said nothing new about the region's water shortage problems, but as only television can, it summarised the case against Yorkshire Water and its seemingly inept management in terms as devastating as they come. In part, the answer to why top management is still in place is the remarkably sanguine view investors have of this extraordinary situation.

The City has never been good at taking an interest in anything that happens north of Watford, not unless it has pound signs written all over it anyway, but given what a widely held stock Yorkshire Water is, you might expect at least some concern. Not so if a straw poll of fund managers conducted yesterday is anything to go by. The company may have failed to get its message across to its customers and industry regulators, but in the City its explanation for the water shortages – an act of God and geography – is widely accepted.

Even the painful financial effects of the drought on the company – it is costing £3m a week to tanker in water from elsewhere while the extra investment needed to make sure this never happens again might ultimately cost hundreds of millions – seems to have passed largely unnoticed; over the past year Yorkshire Water shares have exactly tracked the sector. As far as the stock mar-

ket is concerned, therefore, the company's problems are neither here nor there. So long as the profits and dividends keep rolling in, and the monopoly franchise is safe, who cares what customers think?

A public inquiry is being conducted into Yorkshire's water shortage problems and it is possible this will reflect better on management than *Panorama*'s hatchet job. Failure to anticipate last summer's drought was understandable enough, after all. Even so, there is no doubt that a company that has lost the faith and goodwill of its customers, even when it has the privilege of monopoly, is in serious trouble. It is hard for incumbent management to climb back from the sort of public relations disaster Yorkshire has suffered. Customers need some outward sign that things have, and will, change. That usually means new people in the top jobs. It may be unfair, but it is also the way of the world.

New offensive needed on defence

Defence, like City financial services, is one of Britain's least glamorous but most successful industries. Exports at £5bn a year are second only to those of the US, but with the end of the cold war and the sharp decline in armaments spending here and abroad, the going is tougher than ever for the companies involved.

A joint inquiry by the Commons defence

and trade and industry committees, published yesterday, shows that our own Ministry of Defence, rather than helping, is only exacerbating the problem. Witnesses complained bitterly about the MoD's attitudes. The Defence Manufacturers' Association said MoD procurement policies were seen as "verging on the hostile to the indigenous industrial base".

Though things seem to have improved a little over the past 18 months – attempts to forge partnerships with suppliers have helped – most thought there was a long way to go. To the extent that the MoD adopts a more sensitive approach to the needs of British industry, it only appears to go as far as big spending decisions. The valuable stream of smaller purchases that in total have a tremendous influence on the fortunes of manufacturing companies, are still back in the Dark Ages.

Long-term national security depends equally on the creation of wealth as the strength of the armed forces, the MPs say, and who can argue with that. The most serious impact of this strategic vacuum is a damaging drop in research and development, which in this industry – as in pharmaceuticals – is fundamental to long-term health.

The MPs are surely right in arguing that the MoD should make maintenance of the defence industry's technology base a key priority. They also should urge the Government to look to European collaboration as a better bet than deals with the US. The MPs

backed the creation of national monopolies where necessary, presumably because they approved of GEC's recently acquired control of a large part of warship building.

Specialist government departments such as defence are more interested in their constituency, the armed forces, than in the companies they deal with, which are watched over by the DTI. This seems to be the core of the problem. A solution would surely be for the MoD to measure its success at least in part by the health of the defence industry, so that it can be kicked off when it is seen to fail. The MPs' suggestion that it should share some of the responsibility for overseeing the defence industry and its technology, with the DTI is a sensible one.

Fund-raising the St Petersburg way

St Petersburg is well on the way to becoming one of Europe's most successful cities, gushed its mayor, Anatoly Sobchak. No effort will be spared in driving forward the regeneration of this once great outpost of civilisation, was the thrust of his message yesterday to potential City investors. He might just as well have said that no expense is too great, either. For by any Western standards, St Petersburg is having to pay astonishing prices for the privilege of borrowing money from its domestic Russian investors. And, if Mr Sobchak is to be believed, St

Petersburg is an island of stability and prosperity compared to the rest of Russia. So heaven help the Moscow lot should they choose to follow him down the international bond market path.

The St Petersburg fund-raising programme has been mainly restricted to three-month zero coupon bonds, which on occasion have managed to creep up to nine or even 12 months, long-term by Russian standards. The yield, earlier this year, was over 200 per cent. That means that an investor put up 33 roubles and nine months later collected 100 in return. At those sort of rates, you wonder how St Petersburg can afford to regenerate anything. To get the measure of the market distrust that Mr Sobchak and friends are having to pay for, a two-year US government bond, stripped of its coupon, will yield about 5 per cent. The current rate for long UK gilts is under 8 per cent.

Things would be easier for St Petersburg's financiers if they were borrowing into a rip-roaring inflationary boom, reducing the real value of their repayment burden. But nothing is that simple, for the ruble continues to be loosely pegged to the dollar, hovering around the 4,700 mark. If the peg continues, then an international investor buying into the 18- to 24-month bonds, with which St Petersburg is hoping to entice some City attention, will make an astonishing killing. But will the ruble peg continue, or will the plug be pulled? Clearly not one for widows and orphans.

Cash gains: Research head at cancer drug group reveals Lloyd's losses □ Former ad agency chiefs make £10m in multimedia launch

Biotech man defends his £1.5m share option profit

MAGNUS GRIMOND

Peter Lewis, head of research and development at British Biotech, yesterday defended his decision to cash in share options just days after the group announced a potential breakthrough in cancer treatment.

Since the news, the shares have soared from £10.43, with one deal going through at £25 last week. Mr Lewis's sale at £17.60 a share netted him a

£1.5m profit, with fellow board member James Noble making a further £1.7m from option sales yesterday. The shares closed last night down 110p at £16.08.

Speaking from the company's Oxford base yesterday, Dr Lewis said the options "represented 90 per cent of my financial position and I had to shelter some of my position, as it were. I still think it is a very good company and think the shares will go up further, but I felt I had to protect my position."

Dr Lewis said he had "a very good reason" for raising the cash now as a loss-making name at the Lloyd's of London insurance market. He faces a cash call next year from the new Equitas reinsurance vehicle designed to protect names from huge past losses.

He admitted that the sale "looks unusual", but said that companies like British Biotech were more usual in the US and similar option sales were "a very, very common occurrence" there. He suggested that British



In the money: Maurice Saatchi (right) profited in the Megalamedia launch; Paul Hamlyn made £31m on Reed Elsevier shares

Biotech was already looking like US success stories, such as Amgen and Genentech, which had been built up from scratch.

Dr Lewis was previously vice-president of product development at Marion Merrell Dow, a big US pharmaceuticals group. "The fact of the matter is I consider that these options were part of the package which took me to the company in the first place", he said. "I wouldn't have come without them." Dr Lewis claimed they were part of

the "entrepreneurial start-up culture" of a company like British Biotech.

Dr Lewis exercised his right to convert 106,695 options at 33p a share. He immediately sold 106,000 at the prevailing market price of £17.60, making a profit of £1.5m on the deal. Mr Noble, finance director, exercised 106,695 at 187p and a further 16,000 at 337p. His sale of 110,000 shares left him with a gain of £1.7m.

The company's shares soared



48 per cent last Thursday, adding £244m to its stock market value, after it announced what may be a breakthrough in the treatment of cancer. One deal in the shares went through at over £26 last week, but since then the share price has fallen back, not helped by the news of directors' dealings.

City analysts have become excited by the prospectus for Marimastat, an oral drug which has shown some effectiveness in halting the growth or reducing

the size of cancerous tumours in trials. Some estimates have suggested eventual revenues could top \$1bn.

However, the results, covering 94 late-stage cancer patients, are only preliminary and the drug has a long way to go before gaining approval from the regulatory authorities. Meanwhile, British Biotech, which was floated at 425p a share in 1992, has yet to show a profit or pay its investors a dividend.

Saatchis back in the market with a bang

NIGEL COPE

Charles and Maurice Saatchi, the former heads of the Saatchi advertising empire, were £10m better off yesterday when their new investment vehicle made a spectacular return to the stock market. Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones, who owns shares in the company, has also made a significant gain.

The Saatchi brothers have also emerged as part of a rescue team assembled to bail out Head, the troubled sports equipment maker. The brothers, who made £25m from the flotation of Adidas, will take a 5 per cent stake in the company.

Shares in Megalamedia, Maurice Saatchi's vehicle for acquisitions in the multimedia sector, soared to 83p on their first day's trading on the Alternative Investment Market yesterday. Shares in the company had been suspended at 33p pending the company's first two acquisitions.

The soaring share price values the Saatchis' stake at £14m, compared with £3.5m prior to the re-listing.

Megalamedia, which now has a value of £35m, is the new name for Graduate Appointments Services, a recruitment agency run by Josephine Hart,

Maurice Saatchi's wife. The company was listed on AIM earlier this year but renamed pending the acquisition of two media companies. Its return to AIM was overseen by Shaw Capital, which acted as nominated advisers. The Saatchis now account for around 40 per cent of the new company.

Megalamedia has acquired two companies including Forward Publishing, which produces magazines for companies such as Tesco and Marks & Spencer. Megalamedia also took a 39.8 per stake in The Framstore, a digital special effects company. It favours an aggressive acquisition strategy in multi-media groups.

In a separate media development, Paul Hamlyn, a non-executive director of the publishing group Reed Elsevier, has made £21m following the sale of shares in the company. "I had a minor cash-flow problem," he said.

He sold two million shares in the company but retains 22 million. Mr Hamlyn received his shares in the company after Reed International acquired Octopus Books in 1987 in a deal worth £535m. It is the first tranche of shares he has sold and said he had no immediate plans to sell any more.

Officials dampen hopes of rate cuts

PAUL WALLACE
Economics Editor

Hopes for a cut in interest rates, when Kenneth Clarke meets Eddie George next week were dampened by Treasury officials giving evidence to MPs on the Budget. However, the Ernst & Young Item Club, which uses the Treasury model, warned that interest rates could have to fall by up to 1.5 per cent to make the Budget strategy work.

Alan Budd, the Treasury's chief economic adviser, was asked whether growth of 7.4 per cent could be achieved next year without a fall in interest rates.

Mr Budd replied: "Yes, I do think it is possible."

Another official, Colin Mow, who heads the forecasting section, said that the Treasury did not expect that a cut in interest rates would be appropriate to "hurry up" the inventory adjustment that is now generally expected. Several City analysts are warning that a sharp temporary burst of stock prices will depress growth in the next six months.

Mr Mow said that the Treasury thought the economy would grow at 0.4 per cent in 1995 and then pick up. This forecast of below trend growth in the final

quarter took into account an adjustment of inventories. Subsequently, however, the official forecast spreads the effect more generally across next year and into 1997.

Mr Budd said that the Budget was neutral in the sense that the tax cuts were matched by spending reductions. However, the continuing downward path of the budget deficit, from £29bn this year to £22.5bn in 1996/7, meant that "in an underlying sense fiscal policy is being tightened."

In marked contrast to these views, a report by the Ernst & Young Item Club warned that interest rate cuts of 1 to 1.5 per

cent appeared to be "the only way the government can meet the budget strategy". Paul Droop, chief economist, said that "recent economic developments have made the target of 3 per cent growth most unlikely. This means interest rate cuts would have to be very large to stimulate the sort of growth Mr Clarke's entire strategy depends on."

Mr Budd said that if the broad measure of the money supply, M4, continued to rise at its present rate of around 9 per cent, there would be "increasing causes for alarm" about the future rate of inflation. However, he added that there was

no simple arithmetical relationship between the behaviour of broad money and the outlook for inflation.

The Treasury also cast more light on the drastic downward revision in expected tax revenues next year, from £297bn to £285bn. Tax cuts in the Budget accounted for £3bn, but in addition three taxes were expected to garner much less than had been forecast at the time of the last Budget.

Income tax receipts would be £3bn less (over and above the tax cuts) because the growth of wage and salaries had been less than expected this year. This would knock through to next year.

French turmoil gives boost to Le Shuttle

French transport strikes, discounts on duty-free goods and bad weather in the Channel made November the second most successful month for Eurotunnel's Le Shuttle service, writes Christian Wolmar.

The service carried nearly 130,000 cars, an increase of 7.4 per cent over the previous month and particularly pleasing for the company given that November would normally be a quiet month. Only August, when 135,000 cars went through the tunnel, exceeded November's total. The continuing strife in France is good news for the company and bad weather in the Channel has also been an important factor in making people choose the tunnel rather than ferries.

Heavy discounting also contributed to the heavy flow. Many travellers have taken advantage of £29 return special offers to stock up on their duty-free. Queues of one hour or more have been reported following Eurotunnel's decision earlier this autumn to cut duty-free prices by one-third. Around 12 per cent of customers are specifically travelling through the tunnel for the duty-free goods, a company spokesman said.

The discounting of fares means that the boom in passenger numbers through the tunnel is only mildly good news for the company's beleaguered shareholders but nevertheless shares rose by 4p on the news to 90p.

Viacom chief warns of danger from Murdoch

MARIANNE MACDONALD
Media Correspondent

The American entertainment tycoon Sumner Redstone has accused his rival Rupert Murdoch of posing a threat to the right of free speech.

The chairman of Viacom International said Mr Murdoch's power to contravene rights enshrined in the US First Amendment lay in his role as a "gatekeeper" – controller of an organisation which controls access to systems that deliver programming.

Mr Murdoch is owner or part-owner of the *Sun*, *Times* and *Sunday Times*, BSkyB and Star TV, the rapidly growing Asian satellite network. His interests also include Fox, the American national TV network, a Hollywood movie studio and stakes in Australian broadcasting.

Apart from Ted Turner, the communications magnate, Mr Redstone is seen as the only global media player who could rival Mr Murdoch.

Viacom owns Paramount, the Hollywood studio, the Blockbuster Video chain, MTV Networks, which produces the music video network MTV, and VH-1, a version of MTV for older viewers. Until recently it also owned Madison Square Garden. Mr Redstone criticised Mr Murdoch for controlling distribution of programmes in Europe and Asia and expressed concern about his control of British broadcasting.

The 73-year-old New Englander, who built his empire from a fired string of cinemas, said that while Viacom owned all of the US-based Nickelodeon, the children's cable network, it had been forced to

concede 50 per cent to Mr Murdoch in Britain.

"The reason Murdoch owns 50 per cent is that we couldn't have got a distributor in England any other way," he explained.

The Viacom chairman also attacked Mr Murdoch for his efforts to extend the shelf-life of satellite against the threat from cable, saying he had offered cable operators low rates to tie up programming in the long term because he was concerned about the competition.

Mr Redstone said: "He really has got a stranglehold on the market and is finally attracting a lot of scrutiny. Cable would be a competitor except that he's buying up cable programming by giving special rates."

"There's nothing wrong with mergers or wanting to be bigger. The question is how you use that power," he said.



MIDLAND

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Loans sanctioned before 26.4.89	9.75	0.20	10.0
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business

THE INVESTMENT COLUMN

Edited by TOM SILVERSON

Datacom duds overshadow Racal

As always, Racal's figures are a mixed bag in which good performances from a number of extremely promising businesses have been overshadowed by yet another dismal result from the company's data products division.

That is unfortunate, because it distracts attention from the company's undoubted entrepreneurial skills and the uncanny knack Sir Ernest Harrison has shown over the years for realising shareholder value.

The numbers themselves for the six months to September were in line with expectations – pre-tax profits of £30.1m, up 28 per cent, and a nice 20 per cent rise in the interim payout to 2.1p – so yesterday's share price improvement, up 6p to 276p, was a reflection of the market's welcome for the acquisition of British Rail's in-house telecommunications supplier for £135m.

Buying in profits of £17.6m, the deal is expected to be earnings-enhancing from day one and dilutes the impact of struggling modems, credit card terminals and other computer peripherals on the dominant data communications division. Owning the network should open some useful doors in both Whitehall and the private sector.

That is just as well given the slump into losses of the division once the beneficial contribution of Racal's Camelot stake is stripped out.

Without Camelot, datacoms made a £5m loss compared with an £800,000 profit last year, itself a pathetic return on sales of almost £200m.

The company makes two points, both of which carry some weight. First, Camelot is an integral part of the datacoms division – if it were not so high-profile, and the rest of the business so arcane to the average observer, no one would consider stripping it out in the first place.

Second, the division is showing every sign of having bottomed out – new management has an impressive track record in turning around other apparent basket cases.

But with no one claiming that break-even is any closer than 18 months away, data communication is still a heavy drag on the rest of Racal, itself something of a curate's egg.

Margins are under pressure at the biggest earner, Specialised Businesses, the up-front costs of trying to win the Government's Bowman radio contract are draining Radio Comms, and marine and energy work is highly competitive so Racal was more than usually dependent on an impressive 10 per cent return on sales from its defence companies.

Profits for the full year to March are now expected to reach £73m compared with last year's £58.3m, putting the

shares on a prospective price/earnings ratio of 16. There is plenty of growth potential in Racal, but the shares have had a strong run over the past few years and, with an unexciting yield, they are high enough.

Siebe's future looking rosy

Siebe's business mix, ranging from process controls to compressed air, is hardly one to set pulses racing, but it continues to produce one of the best performances in the engineering sector. It is also testimony to the acquisition skills of Barrie Stephens, the chairman, who has spent more than £1.3bn in the past 12 years picking up businesses.

Yesterday's 21 per cent rise in interim profits to £144m for the half-year to September means Siebe makes nearly as much in six months as it made in 12 in 1991. The profits were struck on turnover 19 per cent ahead at £1.2bn and the half-year dividend rises 10 per cent to 4.44p.

The power house of the group continues to be Foxboro, the US group acquired for £357m in 1990 which led the way in automated controls for industrial plants.

It has gained a useful one or two points of market share in the past 12

months, taking it close to 14 per cent, where it is challenging the industry leaders, Honeywell and Emerson.

That performance helped to spur a 26 per cent rise in operating profits to £68m from Siebe's main control systems division.

With the launch of new Foxboro products and strong growth rates in capital goods markets across the developed world, the future looks set fair for the operation.

Generally a late-cycle business, process controls has been helped by the maturity of the worldwide economic recovery, but Siebe's strength is reflected in the performance of the more consumer-orientated temperature and appliance controls business.

In a market for white goods estimated to be down around 3 per cent this year, the division has done well to raise operating profits 8 per cent to £5.6m. However, although customer stock levels should improve in the second half, lower housing starts in the US and a drop in automotive production could keep the lid on sales growth in the short term.

Aside from the small worries surrounding US consumer markets, the outlook is good for Siebe. Orders up 19 per cent stand at a record £770m and bolt-on acquisitions have still to kick in fully. An extra £10.2m in additional profits has already been squeezed out of the six picked up last year and the four acquired so far in 1995 should con-

tribute £8.9m in a full year, even before treatment.

Group profits of £320m would put the shares at 768p, up 29p, on a forward p/e of 18, which is up with events.

Acquisitions pay off for Sage

Technology stocks can have a nasty habit of turning sour, as shareholders in companies such as Tadpole Technology and MDIS will testify. But, so far, Sage Group, the Newcastle-based writer of accounting software, has proven a welcome exception to the rule.

Since its flotation in 1989 the shares have risen more than tenfold. They jumped a further 13 per cent to 312p yesterday on the back of a bullish end-of-year statement. Pre-tax profits for the year to September were up 57 per cent to £22.4m, marginally ahead of expectations, but this alone did not explain the jump in the shares.

A key factor in Sage's success is that, once it secures a customer, it makes much more money from after-sales service than it does out of the original contract.

Yesterday's news that sales to new customers were up 20 per cent in the UK business and 24 per cent in the US means that more growth is on the way. Sage already has 161,000 support contracts and last year these operations accounted for £48m of the group's £102m sales.

The other part of the Sage model that is working nicely is its approach to acquisitions. Sage's model is to start overseas expansion with a small acquisition which it then knocks into shape.

Sage, the French group that was acquired last year, is a classic example. It contributed £3m in the year and its margins have already been improved from 7 to 11 per cent with more to come. Similar improvements are hoped for at Sybel, the other French business acquired last month.

There are potential dangers. One is a downturn in new customer contracts, which would have a knock-on effect on support revenue.

Another is that of a larger competitor moving into Sage's niche, although the company's brand name and distribution agreements represent high barriers to entry.

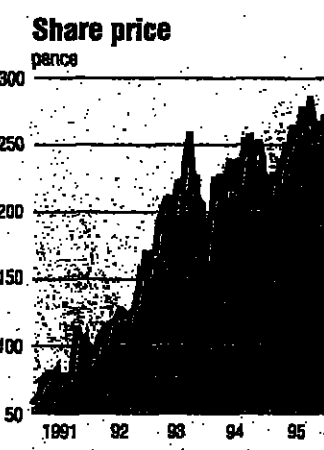
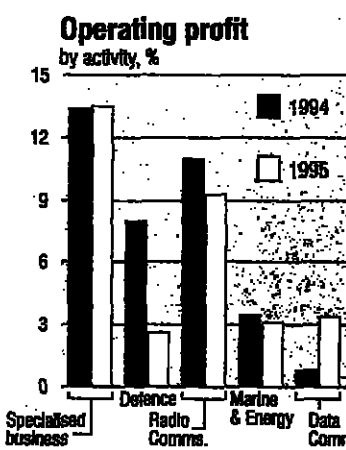
UBS is forecasting profits of £30.4m this year, which puts the shares on a forward rating of 17.

That seems high, but set against exciting prospects it is not too demanding. Good value.

Racal: at a glance

Market value: £788m, share price 227p

Trading record	1993	1994	1995	1994	1995
Turnover (£m)	947	916	950	479.8	505.6
Pre-tax profits (£m)	47.7	26.4	58.3	23.5	30.1
Earnings per share (pence)	10.2	5.5	13.6	5.73	7.09
Dividends per share (pence)	4.25	4.25	5.00	2.10	1.75



Simon Pincombe CITY DIARY

Balloon goes up on a top-level Virgin deal



Taking the plunge: Necker, Richard Branson's Caribbean patch

Horizontal integration at the top of Richard Branson's financial services empire. Tony Wood, the blonde twentysomething responsible for marketing the Virgin Pep, has suddenly taken the plunge with his number two, Rae Canfor. Not known to look a gift horse in the mouth, the young Virgin has accepted the Bearded One's traditional offer to marry on his Caribbean island, Necker, over Christmas.

Mr Branson would normally attend the wedding of two key marketing directors. Unfortunately, (and it falls to us to confirm the disappointing news to the happy couple) the legendary aviator will not be able to join in the festivities. He will be attempting to lose his life in the most spectacular balloon voyage since the Hindenburg had a spot of bother on her final approach.

Which begs the question as to what would happen to the Virgin empire should the unthinkable happen. Mr Branson must have had the devil's

own job in thrashing out a key man insurance policy.

Not that this should concern the honeymooners, who can look forward to the run of the 10-bedroom Guest House, with 26 staff to cater for their every whim.

Still, Mr Branson may yet drop in. Those polar winds are notoriously unpredictable.

At least the betrothed can rest assured that there will be no let-up in the Virgin marketing drive. Determined that as many as possible should attend its Christmas party at the Kensington Roof Gardens last night, Virgin Direct sent a minibus to hover outside the National Westminster Bank party in Bishopsgate Hall. Just in case there were any waverers, you understand.

Leafing through a battered copy of Charles Fort's autobiography (not the rattling good read the cover would suggest) one can see why the

Wontner family fought so hard to prevent the restaurateur from gaining full control of the Savoy. Preserved for posterity on the centre pages is a photograph of the original menu at the Savoy Café (no connection to the hotel) which Charles' immigrant father ran in Alloa, Scotland.

The Café, which seated 60 people, was on Alloa's main shopping street. And while the author insists it was "kept spotless and the service was willing and friendly", anything further removed from the sycophantic London hotel is difficult to imagine.

The "fancy drinks" (price 8d) did not run to anything more exotic than a Phoenix club soda and a chocolate pluff (don't ask). Similarly the Auto Smash was not the sort of thing you would expect to see on the menu of a top London establishment. Quite what a Hippodrome Phosphate was is anybody's guess.

On the subject of the Fort bid, it seems that Granada was unable to convince the City that its planned diversification was more interesting than the Budget. Attempts to sell a 4.15 briefing on 28 November to one analyst was met with "a full and frank exchange of views".

IN BRIEF

Wessex Water attacks Charter decision

Nicholas Hood, chairman of Wessex Water, attacked as "unsound" the Government's decision to refuse Charter mark applications from all water companies because of the severe problems experienced by some firms during the drought. He said that Wessex, which had no water restrictions, had been "surprised and demoralised" by the move. He was speaking as Wessex announced an 18 per cent increase in interim pre-tax profits to £68.4m. The half-time payout increases by 13.6 per cent to 5p.

Strong profits flow at Hozelock

Hozelock, the garden hoses to lighting group, said it had benefited from a strong end to the summer season across Europe as it announced a 32 per cent rise in annual profits to £9.27m yesterday. The company is confident "at this early stage" about prospects for the coming season in all its key markets. Turnover in the year to September jumped a third to £51.5m and a final dividend of 6p raises the total for the year by 18 per cent to 8.7p.

Pet City placing raises £20m

Pet City, the pet superstore group seeking a listing on AIM, has been priced at 300p a share, valuing the company at £72.8m. The placing was over-subscribed and will raise £20m.

Leigh Interests halves interim

Waste treatment group Leigh Interests has halved its interim dividend and plans to reduce capacity and costs in the light of current and foreseeable market conditions. The dividend is cut from 2.46p to 1.23p on a £1m fall in interim profits to £4.2m for the six months to September. Turnover rose 5 per cent to £60.6m.

Eldridge Pope boosts turnover by 31%

Eldridge Pope, the Dorchester-based regional brewer, lifted turnover 31 per cent to £55m and taxable profits by 34 per cent to £3.54m in the year to 30 September. The dividend total is being lifted to 4.6p through a final payment of 2.95p.

Century Inns targets £22.7m

Century Inns, the owner of 316 pubs, is raising £22.7m via a placing and intermediaries offer of 20 million shares at 120p each. Dealings in the shares are expected to start on 19 December. The price of the offer valued the company at £47.4m.

Morrison Construction profits double

Morrison Construction, the recently floated building company, announced more than doubled pre-tax profits for the six months to September of £3.18m (£1.54m) compared with a forecast at the time of flotation of not less than £3.06m.

COMPANY RESULTS

	Turnover £	Pre-tax £	EPS	Dividend
Alford Colliery (p)	22.2m (22.7m)	20.2m (24.2m)	2.51p (3.35p)	0.50p (0.55p)
Anglian Group (p)	98.0m (88.4m)	4.5m (10.1m)	3.5p (7.9p)	3.0p (4.1p)
Barlborough Paper (p)	55.1m (42.1m)	3.54m (2.64m)	13.8p (11.6p)	4.8p (4.1p)
Blackrock (p)	51.4m (88.0m)	9.2m (7.0m)	25.8p (20.2p)	8.7p (7.25p)
Locat Group (p)	60.5m (52.0m)	7.52m (7.82m)	17.4p (18.3p)	6.8p (6.3p)
Midlands Electricity (p)	617m (621m)	82.7m (102m)	37.4p (34.1p)	12.25p (9.3p)
Northern Ireland Elec (p)	213m (210m)	47.7m (44.3m)	24.2p (21p)	5p (3.5p)
North Electricals (p)	500m (490m)	30.1m (23.5m)	7.08p (5.73p)	2.1p (1.75p)
Reps (p)	1.32m (1.01m)	144m (120m)	18.2p (16.2p)	4.44p (4.08p)
Sage Group (p)	72.1m (50.1m)	22.4m (14.3m)	13.88p (9.98p)	2.4p (2.1p)
Tadpole Lloyd (p)	97.5m (94.7m)	3.4m (2.3m)	3.7p (2.8p)	2.5p (2.5p)
Wessex Water (p)	120m (114m)	68.4m (58.2m)	22.7p (20.1p)	5p (4.4p)

(p) - Full (h) - Interim (m) - Nine months

Midlands pays special dividend

MARY FAGAN
Industrial Correspondent

Midlands Electricity bolstered its defences against further takeover bids with a £1-a-share special dividend and a £54.60 rebate for customers after next week's demerger of the National Grid Company.

A previous agreed acquisition by the generator, PowerGen, lapsed in November after the Government referred it to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Bryan Townsend, chairman, said the move reflected Midlands' underlying strength and ability to go forward "in an eventuality", including as an independent company. He refused to comment on whether there have been approaches by other suitors since PowerGen's offer lapsed, but he added: "There are other options. Other things might happen. If a company bids for us we will have to put it to shareholders."

City analysts said that any future bid by PowerGen, should the MMC allow it, would now have to be higher than the previous £10-a-share. One said: "This shows that Midlands is a good solid company and that PowerGen will have to come back with something more to gain control." The share price rose 34p to close at 965p.

The merger negotiations cost Midlands £4.9m in the six months to 30 September. PowerGen still has almost 21 per cent of the company and will gain about £40m from the special dividend.

Midlands' pre-tax profits fell to £92.7m in the first half of the year from £102.4m a year earlier, largely due to higher interest costs after a share buy-back and bid costs.

The interim dividend is up 31.7 per cent to 12.25p and the company has said that the full-year payout will be 37p, an increase of 24.4 per cent.

Midlands' gas subsidiary made an operating loss of £1.2m in the six months because of the sharp fall in spot prices and the problems of over-supply in the marketplace.

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Oats flop worries Beaumont

Racing

RICHARD EDMONDSON

As Master Oats, the Gold Cup winner, plodded to a standstill at Chesham on Saturday, his performance was a mystery to most, but not to a certain Yorkshireman. He thought the gelding had been doped.

This viewer was no squealing pouter from the Ridings, either. It was Peter Beaumont, who trained a Gold Cup winner of his own in 1993, when Jodami was successful.

It remains Beaumont's conviction that Jodami was "got at" the following season when his gelding performed bafflingly in Chesham's Rehearsal Chase. And when the Brandy trainee witnessed the latest running of the event at the weekend he could have been excused for checking if the video-machine was running.

"I don't think it's occurred to anyone else that Master Oats ran like Jodami did in that same race," Beaumont said yesterday.

"When it was happening on Saturday we all said that was exactly like we were two years ago. Master Oats was under pressure from half-way and then he made a bad mistake. Jodami did finish when he ran, but it was

only his courage that got him home."

The similarities are indeed striking. When Jodami went over the Severn Bridge as the Blue Riband victor he was considered to be in peak condition having beaten the odds-on Cab On Target at Haydock. Master Oats, who had won first time out for the previous two seasons, was considered to be in his best-ever nick for a seasonal debut on Saturday.

The tale of two pitios does not diverge from there. Jodami went off a 2-7 favourite in a small field before blundering away his chance three out. He finished third, behind Party Politics and Riverside Boy (who was 20lb out of the handicap). After the race, Jodami blew so hard that

his attendants feared he was close to a heart attack.

When his box returned home to Foulrice Farm, the Yellow Pages listing for paramedics had already been turned down at the corner, but Jodami scampered down the ramp of his box like a lamb on Prozac. When the vet attended, the horse was so well in himself that he looked ready for a canter. Tests uncovered nothing to explain his display. "There was nothing proved, but we all had our thoughts after the race," Beaumont said.

While there were some who fancied Saturday's winning outsider Grange Brake, (who touched 14-1 and 16-1 before setting off at 12-1), there were also bookmakers prepared to

lay Master Oats against his two rivals. There were several recorded wagers of £2,000 and £1,000 before the nine-year-old finished at his shortest price of 4-9.

All went well until the chestnut, like Jodami, tried to take on a fence with the vigour of a bull at a cape. "He gave me the feel of a Gold Cup winner for a circuit, going through the mud like no other horse I have ridden," Jamie Osborne, the jockey, reported, "but, turning for home, the engine just stopped running."

Master Oats, who was pulled up after four out, was found to be blowing abnormally hard and expiring profusely, which his trainer, Kim Bailey, considered to be a symptom of internal problems. The Upper Lambourn trainer, it must be said, has no time for doping theories, and believes instead that his horse broke a blood vessel, as he has done before.

That, though, was over two years and 11 runs before Saturday when Master Oats broke so badly at Ullestree that his trainer feared he would bleed to death. There was no sign of the red stuff on Saturday and little indication that the horse was an invalid in the days that followed.

"There wasn't a scrape at Chesham, so we couldn't scope the horse and if you'd looked down his throat 34 hours later it would have shown nothing," Bailey said yesterday. "We have to drop him down now and build him back up again, put him into his work, scope him, and look again in a week's time."

"Every time a horse, especially a Gold Cup horse like him, runs badly you hear these stories about horses being 'got at' but 99.9 per cent of the time something explains within 10 days to explain it."

Before the end of next week then, we may have evidence of a burst blood vessel; if not there is likely to be in the minds of people, including Peter Beaumont, another rupture — one in the integrity of the sport.

Banker to fill Hartington's seat

Christopher Sporborg, a steward, banker and permit trainer, was nominated by the Jockey Club yesterday to succeed Lord Hartington on the British Horseracing Board.

Currently best known as the chairman of United Racecourses, owners of Epsom, Sandown and Kempton, Sporborg will take up his new position from 7 June 1996 and serve for four years.

Lord Hartington has acted as chairman of the BHB since its inception but Sporborg is not expected to stand for election to that post, enabling Lord Wakeham to become the new chairman.

Also the deputy chairman of Hambros plc, Sporborg has held a number of positions within racing but his membership of the Jockey Club has been of particular value to the BHB.

The BHB hopes eventually to acquire the betting organisation and Sporborg's nomination will double its representation following Peter Jones' appointment to the Jockey Club.

Lord Hartington will be standing down along with Michael Dorell, the board's industry Committee member who does not intend to seek re-election when his term of appointment expires.

Jockeys are scolded by angry Rowe

Local trainer Richard Rowe described yesterday's abandonment of racing at Plumpton because of snow as an "absolute joke". The meeting was cancelled after the jockeys had been recalled from the start of the fifth race.

Rowe, who had a runner in each of the last three scheduled races, said: "I don't blame the stewards — the jockeys panicked. It was snowing, but two

minutes after the abandonment there was brilliant sunshine. At four o'clock, an hour and a half afterwards, there's not a snowflake in sight, and you could easily run two races. Stewards have to be guided by the jockeys, and they couldn't wait to get home. What are they rushing home for? Neighbours?"

Frost and snow is a threat to several other race meetings this week.

RESULTS

HUNTINGDON

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Prost in technical boost to McLaren

Alain Prost, four times world champion, ruled out a return to grand prix driving yesterday as he started a new job as a technical consultant with McLaren.

The 40-year-old Frenchman turned up at the Jerez test track in southern Spain, but soon made it clear his racing days were behind him. It had been thought that he might step in for McLaren - with whom he won three of his four world titles - as Finland's Mika Häkkinen failed to make a full recovery from the head injuries he suffered in practice for the Australian Grand Prix in Adelaide last month.

"This is all in the past," he said. "I now have a new role, a new job and I just hope that Mika will be OK for the first race. It is not really a question for me." However, Prost made it clear he relished the opportunity of trying to help McLaren revive their glory days after two seasons without a victory when the new season starts in Australia on 10 March.

"I am not going to be more than test-driving the car," he said. "I will be evaluating the car, because when I speak to the drivers I want to know what they are talking about. I hope it is going to be an advantage for McLaren. I am not here to test the car this time. I don't know when I will test again, but that is something I will have to discuss with the team."

"I am here first of all to see what is going on, to meet the people and to build a relationship with David Coulthard. That is the most important thing for me."

Naseem Hamed yesterday described Wayne McCullough as the Irish fighter who has won the World Boxing Council bantamweight title as well as an Olympic silver medal — as “not even a fourth division fighter”.

And Hamed may get the chance to say it to McCullough first hand on 16 March, if he fights on the Mike Tyson-Frankie Bruno WBC heavyweight title card in Las Vegas, the United States’s adopted home town. But Hamed is a native of Mexico City, the home of the Mexican, Arnulfo Castillo, in the first defence of his World Boxing Organisation featherweight title at the London Arena on February 10.

McCullough said Hamed was “scared” to fight him at bantamweight after his eighth-round stoppage of the Dane Johnny Bredahl in Belfast on Saturday.

Hamed, who is recovering from a fracture to his right hand, said he was “not even a fourth division fighter. He’s a prohibitive fifth division fighter,”

The record number of countries who have confirmed that they will send teams to the Olympics in Atlanta next summer. The previous highest was 169 set at the 1992 Barcelona Games.

The backbone of Blackburn's Pontin's League team will tonight be asked to achieve what the club's Premiership-winning side signally have failed to do - win a Champions' League game.

For their European Cup swan-song, at home to Rosenborg Trondheim, Blackburn will be without at least nine squad members. Colin Hendry, David

Baity and Graeme Le Saux are all suspended after the Moscow fiasco; Lars Bohinen, Billy McKinlay, Graham Fenton and Niklas Gudmundsson are ineligible; while Chris Sutton has joined long-term casualties Ian Pearce and Jason Wilcox on the list of walking wounded.

A further two of the players who opened Blackburn's ill-starred Group B campaign, Lee Makiel and Mark Atkins, have left, leaving defenders Nicky Marker, Adam Reed and

Marion Broomes in line to face the Norwegians. Marker, formerly of Plymouth, has limited first-team experience. Reed, a £200,000 buy from Darlington, and Broomes, a graduate of the FA National School, have not yet had that dubious pleasure.

Paul Warhurst, the defender-turned-striker whom Ray Harford has tended to use in midfield, is likely to revert to the back four. Another fringe player, Kevin Gallacher, is expected to start for the first time since

the opening day of the season after what Blackburn's manager described as a "torrid time" with injuries.

With a record of one point and one goal (by Mike Newell in Trondheim) in five games, Harford showed masterly under-statement yesterday when he said: "We haven't done as well as we would have hoped. But I believe everyone at the club is a little wiser for the experience. You have to learn as you go along - if you don't you're a fool."

Blackburn's principal folly, apart from aberrations such as the Batty-Le Saux punch-up, has been a lack of tactical flexibility. Roseberg offer a more "British" approach than Spartak Moscow or Legia Warsaw, but Harford would not have had the match to experiment anyway. "Despite our selection problems, we won't be changing the system," he said.

In contrast, Rangers, who have also been eliminated, will be at virtually full strength for their visit to Borussia Dortmund.

Scottish champions found temperatures of -3C and flurries of snow on landing in Germany, though it is the *Bundesliga* leaders who seem to be under the weather. Matthias Sammer (bronchitis) and Julio Cesar (flu) may have to sit out the game with the suspended Jürgen Kohler.

Unlike his Blackburn counterpart, the Rangers manager, Walter Smith, can reasonably expect to be back in the European Cup next autumn. He is therefore anxious that Paul

Gascoigne, Richard Gough, Stuart McCall and John Brown each avoids the yellow card that would make the offender unavailable for the first match of the 1996-97 competition.

Three places in the last eight are still up for grabs. Bobby Robson, coach to Porto, could maintain a modicum of English interest, although in order to qualify, his team must overcome Scpp Piontek's Aalborg in Denmark and hope that Nantes lose against Panathinaikos.



Happy return: Boris Becker plays the ball back to France's Cedric Pioline during his 6-1, 6-7, 9-7 victory in the Grand Slam Cup in Munich yesterday

Photograph: Wolfgang Rattay/Reuter

Becker struggles through as top seeds fall

With top 10 players tumbling out in rapid succession from the richest tournament in the world yesterday, -- Boris Becker squeezed into the quarter-finals of the Grand Slam Cup in Munich by outlasting the Frenchman Cedric Pioline. Becker easily won the first set but then had to battle hard to win 6-1, 6-7, 9-7.

earning at least \$250,000 (\$160,000). Thomas Muster (No 3) and Michael Chang (No 5) were eliminated.

Muster, the French Open champion, at least went home \$350,000 richer - a \$250,000 bonus for winning one of the Grand Slam events of the season, plus \$100,000 given to all first-round losers here.

The Zimbabwean Byron Black, ranked No 40 in the world, beat Muster 7-6, 2-6, 6-1. Black, like Pioline qualified only after the withdrawal of Andre Agassi and the 1992

winner Michael Stich, who are both injured.

Jacco Eltingh, a Dutch doubles specialist who is ranked No 43, beat Chang 7-6, 6-3, with an aggressive game on the fast carpet surface.

The tournament invites 16 players with the best records in the four Grand Slam events in a year – the Australian, French and US Opens and Wimbledon – and the winner will receive \$1.625m. It is played under Grand Slam rules, which means there is no tie-break in the decisive set.

Becker, a three-times Wimbledon champion who won the ATP World Championship in Frankfurt last month, easily won the first set against Pioline. But Pioline picked up his game in the second set and clinched the tie-break.

Becker wasted two break points in the 11th game of the third set, but he still managed to break for 6-7 with a brilliant forehand passing shot down the line.

After two successive acts, Becker had earned three match points. Pioline saved

one, but the German blasted his 14th ace to finish the match. The outcome resembled Becker's quarter-final victory over Pioline at Wimbledon this year, where he squandered a two-set lead and then won 9-7 in the fifth.

"I played the first set like a world champion, but then he found his timing, he began to serve well and it became close," said Becker, who was cheered by a sell-out crowd of 11,000 in the city where he now lives when he is in Germany.

Mustser was slowed by blisters

Black is the first beneficiary of the Grand Slam Development Fund to play at the tournament. The Grand Slam Cup pays \$2m annually to the fund that helps young players and the game worldwide.

Black was helped by the fund, which paid for him to travel to junior tournaments, work with a coach and attend a tennis academy. "They have really helped me and guided me in my game," he said.

Fresh from anchoring America to victory over Russia in the Davis Cup final in Moscow over the weekend, Pete Sampras, the Wimbledon and US Open champion, begins his campaign here today against a fellow American Patrick McEnroe.

In other matches today, Todd Martin, who helped Sampras win the key Davis Cup doubles on Sunday, plays Sergi Bruguera, Andrei Medvedev meets Aaron Krickstein while Renzo Furlan will be up against Yevgeny Kafelnikov.

Richards offers to mediate in Lara dispute

Viv Richards has come to his country's rescue once or twice before and has offered his services again to help settle the dispute between the batsman Brian Lara and the West Indies cricket officials.

three other players, by the West Indies Cricket Board of Control for misconduct during this year's tour of England.

"I carry no weight with the board, but I am so dismayed by the affair that, here and now, I volunteer to mediate in an attempt to get a batsman better than I ever was, back on track to help West Indies mount a se-

Lara withdrew from the tour of Australia apparently because he was upset at being penalised for an incident he was led to believe had been settled by the tour committee in England.

Injury is forcing Charles Haley out of Dallas Cowboys, to retire. He

to continue under new ownership. The Cowboys' 24-17 loss to the Washington Redskins, because of lower back pain caused by a ruptured disc. Haley was released out of retirement after last season with a \$3m signing-on bonus, and half of that counts against the team's salary cap for the 1996 season whether or not Haley ever plays again.

Herman Moore set a franchise record with 14 catches for 183 yards as the Detroit Lions beat the Chicago Bears 27-7 on Monday night.

NFL: Detroit 27 Chicago 7.

NATIONAL FOOTBALL CONFERENCE

Rain forces touring West

The injured pace bowlers Fanie de Villiers and Brett Schultz have been left out of South Africa's provisional World Cup squad. Also omitted from the list for the tournament starting on 25 February in India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka were the bowlers Clive Elsteven and Meyrick Pingle, who played in the second Test against England.

SOUTH AFRICA PROVISIONAL WORLD CUP SQUAD: W J Cronje (capt), A C Hudson, G Kirsten, D J Cullinan, J N Rhodes, B M Middleton, D J Richardson, S M Pollock, C P Matthews, A A Donald, P Adams, O N Coetzee.

Dec. 21. Pines
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9th Dec. M.C.

9th Dec: G Wyley (Birmingham) 3 matches from
10th Dec: K Bailey (Sunderland) 3 matches from
8th Jan: M Ben Der Luan (Dorset) 2 matches
from 9th Dec.

MONDAY'S LAKE RESULTS: FA Carling Pre-
mier League: Sheffield Wednesday 4 Coventry 3. FA
Unibro Trophy third qualifying round second
replay: Bishop Cleeve 3 Witton Albion 1 (Bishop
Cleeve moved on to Boscobel Green). Football
League Cup first round: Luton Town 2 Ipswich
Town 1. Worcester 3 Stourbridge 0. Kent League
Guardian Insurance Cup second-round replay:
Polegate United 2 Basingstoke Town 3. Unibank
League: 15 matches postponed. Great Mills
League Premier Division: Thurston Town 2.
FA Senior League: 1st West Bromwich 0 (at
Gateshead), Tranmere Rovers 3 Birmingham City
2. Wolves 0 Everton 1 (at Telford Unit), Salford

Philadelphia
Florida
NY Rangers
New Jersey

Washington	11	12	5	65	68	24
Tampa Bay	9	12	5	74	91	23
NY Islanders	6	15	3	65	94	15
WESTERN CONFERENCE						
CENTRAL DIVISION						
Detroit	18	6	2	98	57	39
Winnipeg	13	10	3	95	68	24
Chicago	11	9	6	88	80	28
Toronto	11	9	5	82	71	27
St. Louis	1	12	3	68	74	26
Dallas	7	7	6	65	65	24
PACIFIC DIVISION						
Colorado	15	7	4	107	79	34
Los Angeles	11	10	6	87	86	24
Anaheim	11	15	2	87	89	28
Vancouver	7	11	7	88	99	21
Edmonton	7	14	5	67	107	19
Calgary	5	16	5	64	94	15

ship v No
Quarant (F
ingham). B
Thomycroft

J Fair (Warrington FISH); M Volland (Northampton); R Cockburn (Luscombe); N Webster (Wootton Bassett); J Phillips (Northampton); D Sewell (Coventry); I Skingley (Bodolai); B Poussey (Northampton); C Tarrach (Luscombe, capt); Replacements: S Glover (Rugby Lions), P Challenor (Harlequins), D Bishop (Rugby Lions), C Johnson (Northampton), M Freer (Northampton), & Seely (Northampton)

TODAY'S FIXTURES

7.30 UNLESS stated

CHINESE CHAMPIONS' LEAGUE GROUP A
Members: 10
Aussing v Perth

GROUP B
Members: 10
Wahman v Spierke Moscow v
Buckfarms Kovara v Rosenberg

GROUP C
Members: 10
Bachman v Juventus
Berkovs Dorfman v Rangers

GROUP D
Members: 10
Zurich v Real Madrid
Agra v Fokasianos

10.00 CHAMPIONSHIP
MEX v CHA Third round second leg: Real Betis
vs Atletico Madrid 3-0

**REPRESENTATIVE MATCH: Football Association
v Isle League 12 at Portland FC**

WORLD CHAMPIONS' LEAGUE GROUP A
Members: 10
Farnham v Newport Nant, De Marnettes CH second
round vs United FC

GROUP B
Members: 10
Farnham v Newport Salisbury v Dorchester

**UNION LEAGUE First Division: Leigh v Wigan
Friday**

UNION LEAGUE NORTHWEST LEAGUE
First Division
Barnham Symington v Whiteharts
Saturday 10.00
Pills Langley CH third round vs Dorset City

[illegible][illegible]

Thursday	7	6	0	202	297
Friday	7	6	0	203	297
Saturday	7	6	0	203	297
Sunday	7	6	0	203	297

Athletics

Khalid Siah, the Olympic 10,000 metres champion, yesterday pulled out of the 10,000 metres evening international on 30 December. The Moroccan has decided to concentrate on altitude training for his defence of the title in Atlanta next summer.

Basketball

National Basketball Association referees ratified a contract proposal on Monday, ending a league-wide lock-out imposed by owners since before the season began. The referees ratified a five-year contract that provides an 18.7 per cent salary increase in the first year and 10 per cent over the duration of the deal. NBA: Boston 121, Miami 120 (q); Denver 85 Detroit 82.

[illegible][illegible]

Snowboarding was yesterday approved as an Olympic event by the International Olympic Committee at their executive session in Lausanne, Switzerland. The decision promises to boost the number of events to be held at the Nagano Winter Games in 1998. Other new events will be women's ice hockey and curling.

Rugby Union

Philippe Benetton, the French banker, is out of this season's Five Nations' tournament after losing his right arm for the second time this year.

Richard Cockerill, the Leicester and England hooker, will make his first C&S Divisional Championship appearance of the season for Midland in Saturday's decider against the North at Beeston. Cockerill replaces Northampton's Tim Bedford and plays in a strong front row alongside the Under-21 props, Matt Volland and Nathan Wedderburn.

The International Olympic Committee yesterday said the new four-year suspension of doping officials at the summer games in Atlanta, Georgia, following the Olympic Games (FINA) last week, was too stiff. IOC board member, Richard Pound of Canada, said: "We must give penalties but we must also have some incentives. Athletes to be virtually banned from taking part in future events". At a congress in Rio de Janeiro last week, FINA doubted the two-year suspension of those found to have used anabolic steroids.

